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Robert Buchanan

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

AND OTHER ESSAYS

Robert Buchanan

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

HENRY MURRAY

'I pass too surely: let at least Truth stay'

BROWNING (*Cleon*)

LONDON

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TO

SAMUEL MACKEW, ESQ., M.D.

My Dear Doctor,—

It was at your instigation, and under your editorial auspices, that a considerable part of the work contained in this volume was done. I find a sincere pleasure in dedicating the book to you as a memento of our connexion. Believe me always,

Yours sincerely,

HENRY MURRAY.

London, June 1901.

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Robert Buchanan.

I FIRST met Robert Buchanan in the summer of 1885. Our acquaintance, for some time of a lax and ordinary kind, was—very characteristically of such a man—cemented into a warm and enduring friendship by an occurrence which would have brought most acquaintances to an abrupt termination. An article from his pen on 'The Modern Young Man as Critic' appeared in a monthly review, attracting a good deal of attention and a considerable amount of public comment. It compared some of the more prominent among the younger literary personalities of the day with corresponding types with which Buchanan had been familiar in his youth, and denounced their pessimism, their irreverence, and their cheap culture in the cut-and-thrust fashion we had all, long before that date, learned to associate with his polemical utterances. I was at that time associated with a certain weekly publication, now extinct, which enjoyed a great reputation for smart and outspoken comment on current topics, and my editor—who was more or less *lié* with more than one of the objects of Buchanan's onslaught—commissioned me to reply to his article.

My feelings towards Buchanan at that time were of a somewhat mixed description, compounded of admiration for the genius evident in his best work, and regret that he should so often fall below the lofty level which, in his happier moments, he attained and kept so easily; and in my criticism of 'The Modern Young Man as Critic' the second of those sentiments certainly found stronger expression than the first. I had at that time a tendency, which perhaps even now I have not altogether outworn, to let my pen run away with me, and to express the passing mood of the moment with unnecessary strength. What I said was, as Buchanan himself subsequently confessed, true enough, but it was truth savagely spoken, and I have to own that the article was permeated by a certain air of personal resentment, quite unjustified by the circumstances of the case. As the hazards of life drew us closer and closer together I regretted my virulence more and more; and when, some months after the appearance of my ill-tempered article, Buchanan, by a most thoughtful and quite unsolicited act of friendship, showed how kindly he had come to regard me, I felt that the hour for full confession had arrived. I wrote to him, avowing myself the author of the article and apologising more for its manner than its matter. His reply was like himself—frank, cordial, generous. 'Nobody knows better than I how, in these random fights of the literary arena, a man loses his temper and strikes harder than he need. I have many such sins on my conscience.

There is really very little in your article that you need regret, and indeed, knowing how you feel on these matters, I do not see how you could well have written otherwise. . . . . To requite your candour, I was fairly certain that you had written the article, and *quite* certain, if my belief was true, that you would sooner or later "own up" to it. Don't avoid me like the plague because you have voluntarily gone into the confessional, but come up to dinner next Sunday and do penance.' The matter was never again mentioned between us, and this apparently untoward accident was the starting-point of an absolutely uncheckered friendship of more than twelve years' duration. I mention it here only because it was so richly characteristic of a side of Buchanan's nature which the majority of people, knowing him merely from his published utterances, could hardly believe him to possess. A man of passionately cherished ideals, most of which were utterly opposed to the practice of his day; a man who, while he lived, must freely speak whatever truth he saw, at whatever cost to the feelings or interests of individuals; he was incapable of the least personal malice towards an opponent. His relations with Rossetti furnish an illustrative case. It is certainly not worth while, at this time of day, to dig up the buried and forgotten bitternesses to which the once famous 'Fleshly School' criticism gave rise. The protagonists—Buchanan himself and the men of genius he had attacked—fought their battle vehemently, but

honestly. There was hard hitting in plenty, but none 'below the belt.' But smaller and less honest partisans envenomed the strife with all sorts of petty falsehood. The absolutely unfounded statement that Buchanan had puffed his own poems in the pseudonymous 'Thomas Maitland' article has been quite recently revived, and, so long as the memory of the incident remains, will probably never be finally laid to rest. But all the petty spite imported into the dispute by the outside skirmishers could not prevent Buchanan from owning that he had overstated his case, and in the ardour of over-statement had neglected sufficiently to recognise Rossetti's genius. To that genius he paid eloquent tribute on more than one occasion, but never so touchingly as in the dedication to Rossetti of his novel, 'God and the Man.'

TO AN OLD ENEMY.

I would have snatch'd a bay leaf from thy brow,
  Wronging the chaplet on an honoured head;
In peace and tenderness I bring thee now
  A lily-flower instead.

Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,
  Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be:
Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,
  And take the gift from me.

Ten months later came the news of Rossetti's death, and Buchanan added the sad and charming lines:—

Calmly, thy royal robe of Death around thee,
Thou sleepest, and weeping Brethren round thee stand;
Gently they placed, ere yet God's angel crowned thee,
My lily in thy hand.

I never saw thee living, oh my brother,
But on thy breast my lily of love now lies,
And by that token we shall know each other
When God's voice saith 'Arise!'

A year or two later (in 1877), in 'A Look Round Literature,' he emphasised and extended this already sufficient apology, moved thereto by an article in the *British Quarterly*, the writer of which, says Buchanan, 'takes occasion to repeat at second-hand, for a wiser generation, all the hasty expressions and uninstructed abuse that I published in hot haste ten years ago, and have since, as my readers know, repented. It is so easy,' he goes on, 'to create a nickname that will stick, so difficult to write a criticism that will endure. Perhaps it may be worth while . . . . to show the readers of this book how false a judgment it was, how conventional and Pharisaic a criticism, which chose to dub as "fleshly" the works of this most ethereal and dreamy—in many respects this least carnal and most religious—of modern poets.' Seldom have royaller compliments been paid by a poet to a contemporary poet than those Buchanan poured at the feet of Rossetti. 'The man was a magician, of the tribe of Kubla Khan; and at his bidding there rose a stately pleasure dome, every precious stone of which

had a name and a mystery, and when he entered it to weave his strange verse, he was within his right in using the language of incantation. . . . . If he was wrong, all the mystics have been wrong; Boehmen was a blunderer, Richter was a proser, Novalis was no poet.' And in the brief following passage he plumbed the depth of the mystery of Rossetti's work: 'He uses amatory forms and carnal images, just as he uses mere sounds and verbalisms, to express ideas which are purely and remotely spiritual; and he takes the language of personal love to express his divine yearning, simply because that language is the most exquisite quintessence of human speech.' And again: 'This mood of perfect vision and grave assurance inspires all the best work of Rossetti. He has no questions to ask, no problems to trouble him; he is sibylline, not from being puzzle-headed, but because he has looked behind the curtain of the sibyl. He *sees* the trees walk, he hears the flowers speak, with a sober certainty of waking bliss. When an angel passes him, he can feel the very texture of his robe, and tell the colour of his eyes. He is as sure of Heaven and all its white-robed angels as ordinary men are of each other.' Further on, speaking of the Sonnet Sequence, 'The House of Life,' which the *British Quarterly* reviewer had stigmatised as a 'house of ill-fame,' he wrote: 'It is, to a certain extent, monotonous, and the sacrament of flesh and blood has a constant place in it; but out of this sacrament rises the ghostly vision of the Host,

and ere he has ended we hear the voices of all the angels praising the Lord of Heavenly Love. And of this strange texture, of this starry woof, is the so-called "fleshly" poetry. . . . . The stairs of the earthly love lead to the heavens; he ascends them step by step, that is all, hand in hand with his sweet guide—who is a bright earthly maiden at the beginning, then a bride, then a shining creature, winged and marvellously transfigured; the rest in order; last, an amethyst! You can transfigure Love, but you can never transfigure Lust; this last never made an angel, or inspired a true poem, yet.' 'And so,' he adds as his final word—a word which, one might be excused for hoping, might be allowed to remain the last regarding the entire business—'And so, when all is said and done, the friendly criticism remains the best and wisest. Those who have read Mr. Swinburne's eulogy of his master, and thought it, perhaps, a little strained, may admit, at least, that it was strained, like all eulogy of love, in the right direction. My own abuse was and is, like all hasty contemporary abuse, nothing. Mr. Swinburne's honest praise was, and is, like all honest praise, something. The poet of "The House of Life" is beyond both; but his fame will remain, when all detraction is forgotten, as a golden symbol, *ære perennius*, of much that was best and brightest in the culture of our time.'

It is pleasant also to know that, even in the first heat of the strife occasioned by Buchanan's

original criticism, Rossetti could recognise the high qualities of his assailant, as he showed when he interrupted the denunciations of an ardent partisan by the emphatic exclamation, 'Yes—but, by Jove, *he's a poet!*' As Christopher North said, when he held out the olive-branch to his old foeman, Leigh Hunt, 'The animosities pass, the humanities are eternal.'

It may interest the reader, and may serve as a further illustration of the real kindliness of personal feeling which underlay Buchanan's occasional virulence of attack, to read the brief address to two of his oldest and most persistent opponents, the late Edmund Yates and the living Henry Labouchere, which was, by a mere accident, left out of its proper place in the first—and at present, only—volume of 'The Outcast.'

So, Edward, Henry, *pax vobiscum*,
Arcades ambo, here's adieu!
All strife, all hate, at last to this come—
The silent grave, the sunless yew.
The scandal-monger, the truth-seeker,
The man of this world or a fairer,
Must drink at last of the same beaker,
Whereof a skeleton is bearer.
A little space a little life,
A little time a little strife,
Then calm, then rest, then slumber deep,
'Mid the black brotherhood of sleep.
As Rome was once, when on the Tree
Bloom'd the blood-rose of Calvary,
So is our England now, and you
Perform your parts like Romans true.

Afoot or horse-back, proud or prone,
Continue beautiful and brave,
And take a smile, and not a stone,
From him who walketh all alone
The common highway to the grave.

The student of Buchanan who would thoroughly understand his work—and more especially his critical work, literary or social—must be careful to keep in mind one pregnant fact regarding him. He was the descendant of a long line of Calvinistic Puritans, and, although half an Englishman by the maternal side, and bred, to his tenth year, south of the Border, he was, in many respects, a thorough-going Scotsman. The Celtic ichor accounted for much of his utterance as a writer, and much of his conduct as a man. When the Cockney critic anathematised him as a 'provincial,' he not merely accepted the description, he proclaimed and gloried in it—as also did another Scotsman, with whom in most respects he had little enough in common—Thomas Carlyle. The practice of the literary art in the freest of Bohemian society, influences which act with such deadly effect as solvents on the prejudices, innate or acquired, of most men, never affected in any appreciable degree Buchanan's philosophy of life. Loathing Calvinistic theology, he remained a Calvinistic moralist to the end of the chapter; and that morality impregnates every serious utterance on life and its mysteries that ever fell from his pen. Absolutely at the antipodes of mere asceticism—no man better loved the good things of this life than he—sensuality

was horrible to him. It was for that reason that he fell foul of Rossetti, as on other occasions he fell foul of Mr. Swinburne and Théophile Gautier, because—mistakenly, as we have seen that he candidly and generously confessed—he thought him what Byron, in his 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,' called Thomas Moore, 'A mere melodious advocate of lust.' To Buchanan, sexual love was one of two things. Sanctified by affection, it was the holiest and most beautiful thing in life; not so sanctified, the basest and most degrading. Men of the world find foothold for themselves somewhere between these extremes of opinion; but in many respects Buchanan had no desire to be accepted as a man of the world, and, as one who knew intimately every detail of his personal life for many years, I can testify that he at least sealed his faith by his daily practice. A man is never a Puritan upon one point alone, and Buchanan's puritanism, so far from being merely sexual, invaded and coloured his views of all the important questions of life. He hated triviality, cackle and small talk and scandal, and anything which could come under Matthew Arnold's sweeping definition of 'intellectual levity.' Consequently, he had scant love for modern journalism, and especially for that department of journalism marked by the prefix 'Society.' Hence his vehement onslaughts on Mr. Yates and Mr. Labouchere, and much of the criticism of contemporary art and literature which earned for him, among strangers to his personality, a reputation as a cantankerous spoil-sport.

It was Buchanan's innate tendency and cultivated habit to look almost entirely to the *ethical* value of any literary work which attracted his attention. He summed up his critical doctrine in a single phrase in the 'Epistle Dedicatory' of 'The Outcast,' to 'C. W. S.,' a phrase to the effect that 'a Poet was a Prophet and a Propagandist or nothing.' This present utterance of mine being intended, not as a eulogy at-any-price—a form of literary exercise which Buchanan detested—but as a critical appreciation, I may say that this phrase neatly defines the battle-ground of many a tough and interminable argument between us. I do not go so far as absolutely to reverse Buchanan's dictum, or even so far as to say that a poet is never less a poet than when he is engaged in preaching or propagandising; though either of those positions is, I believe, quite tenable, and both have been frequently and ably defended. Personally, I fly very light in the matter of artistic dogma. The one qualification I inexorably demand of an artist is—that he shall know his business. So long as a painter's pictures are beautiful in form and colour, so long as a poet's verses are clear in meaning and exquisite in verbal expression, they are good enough for me—barring, of course, the artistic expression of cases of abnormal ethical aberration, such as have sometimes, though very rarely, occurred. *La correction de la forme, c'est la vertu*, said Théophile Gautier, and in matters artistic I accept that ruling, with certain private reservations which I feel no need to express at length.

To a man of Buchanan's mental habits, such a declaration necessarily appeared as the confession of a Sadducee and a *dilettante* trifler, tolerant of all moralities for the simple reason that he had none of his own—the view taken by the dogmatist of the latitudinarian in all ages. But I cannot but think that his intransigeance on this point cost him much. It certainly blinded him to the mere artistic beauty of much work which happened to be based upon interpretations of the eternal verities differing from his own—such, for instance, as that of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. Though I share to the full Buchanan's hatred of the ultra-Jingo views which Mr. Kipling has made it his business to interpret, I cannot but think it a pity that any divergence of opinion should disable a critic of that gentleman's work from perceiving and enjoying even its merely technical excellence, or should cause him to ignore much of Mr. Kipling's writing from which the taint of chauvinism is altogether absent—such work as 'In the Rukh,' or the little tale which has been described, not unworthily, as 'the best short story in the language,' 'Without Benefit of Clergy;' or such of his verses as 'Recessional' and 'What the People said;' or to forget the splendid verbal strength and directness which make even his banalities and vulgarisms more than half pardonable. So also, in judging Mr. Bernard Shaw, Buchanan laid stress on the irresponsible cynical mockery which—if that singularly constructed man of genius could only be persuaded to see it—is his weakness, rather than on his really admirable powers as a

dramatic constructor, and as a writer of trenchant and characteristic dialogue. It should be added, in justice both to Buchanan and to Mr. Shaw, that Buchanan revised—or rather supplemented—his original criticism by the following lines, published in 'The New Rome.'

No Slave at least art *thou*, on this dull Day
When slaves and knaves throng in Life's banquet-hall! . . .
Who listens to thy scornful laugh must say
'Wormwood, though bitter, is medicinal!'

Because thou turnest from our feast of Lies
Where prosperous priests with whores and warriors feed,
Because thy Jester's mask hides loving eyes
I name thee here, and bid thy work 'God speed!'

In many a conversation with Buchanan I expressed my fear that this insistence on the merely ethical outlook of each individual writer by an authority of his weight might act rather for evil than for good. It expressed a mental attitude already too common, to my thinking, among Englishmen, and it has resulted in the cases of people of small artistic feeling or culture in absurdities which have more than once made England the laughing-stock of the intellectual world. An extreme case was the publication, a few years ago, of an edition of 'David Copperfield,' from which the episode of Steerforth and little Em'ly had been expunged as unfitted for family reading! To insist to the English public on the propagandist duties of the verbal artist is rather like carrying coals to Newcastle. To mix a metaphor, the pendulum of English opinion has always shown a sufficiently marked inclination to the

side of 'moral value.' We have, as a nation, at least enough of the utilitarian, as opposed to the purely artistic, leaven in our blood, and stand in greater need of artistic than of moral culture. To persuade Buchanan either of the truth or the expediency of such a standpoint was, of course, quite impossible. The artistic beliefs of such men as he are no more 'idle' than were the 'manners' of the Knights of the Table Round, they are the fruits of a strong personal intelligence, sedulously cultured.

But, when any great principle was at stake, no man was less hidebound by preconceptions than Buchanan. Much as he loved, and fiercely as he defended, certain minor dogmas, he would forego their interests where major interests were concerned, as he proved by his warm defence of Emile Zola, long before that great writer—and greater Man—had won the suffrage of every honest man alive by his splendidly heroic defence and rescue of the unfortunate Dreyfus, and when he was at the very nadir of English public opinion.

Everybody will remember how, in 1889, the veteran publicist and historian, Mr. Henry Vizetelly, was condemned, through the action of a clique of pestilent busybodies known as the 'National Vigilance Association,' to a term of imprisonment for publishing translations of Zola's novels. The Press for the most part applauded the foolish and tyrannical proceeding, and Buchanan was the one English man of letters of any weight or position who resented the barefaced outrage on literature and liberty. He addressed an open

letter, in the form of a pamphlet, to Mr. Henry Matthews, then Home Secretary, praying, in the interests of justice and humanity, for Mr. Vizetelly's release. English officialism could, of course, take no note of so irregular a plea, however well supported by logic and eloquence ; but 'On Descending into Hell' (the pamphlet in question) deserves to take its place by Milton's 'Areopagitica' and John Mill's 'Essay on Liberty' as an irrefutable argument on the side of freedom of thought and expression. Had Shakespeare or Victor Hugo been the insulted author instead of the writer of 'Pot-Bouille' and 'La Terre,' this 'speech for the defence' could not have been conducted with closer reasoning or more generous fervour. 'I affirm,' wrote Buchanan, 'that Emile Zola was bound to be printed, translated, read. Little as I sympathise with his views of life, greatly as I loathe his pictures of human vice and depravity, I have learned much from him, and others may learn much ; and had I been unable to read French, these translations would have been to me an intellectual help and boon. *I like to have the Devil's case thoroughly stated, because I know it refutes itself.** As an artist, Zola is unjustifiable ; as a moralist, he is answerable ; but as a free man, a man of letters, he can decline to accept the fiat of a criminal tribunal.' The pamphlet ends with a passage which, for terseness of argument and cogency of illustration, has few rivals in nineteenth-century polemical literature :—

* 'Who has ever seen Truth worsted in a fair field ?'—Milton's 'Areopagitica.'

Wholesale corruption never yet came from corrupt literature, which is the effect, not the cause, of social libertinage. Do we find morality so plentiful among the godly farmers and drovers of Annandale, or among the unco' guid of Ayrshire or Dumfriesshire—thumbers of the Bible, sheep of the Kirk? Stands Scotland anywhere but where it did, though it has not yet acquired an æsthetic taste for the Abominable, but merely realises occasionally the primitive instincts of *La Terre?* Dwells perfect purity in Brittany and in Normandy, despite the fact that Zola there is an unknown quantity, and Paris itself a thing of dream? Bestialism, animalism, sensualism, realism, call it by what name you will, is antecedent to, and triumphant over, all books whatsoever. Books may reflect it, that is all; and I fail to see why they should not, since it exists. I love my Burns and like my Byron, though neither was a virtuous or even a 'decent' person. My Juvenal, my Lucretius, my Catullus, and even my *porcus porcorum* Petronius, are well read. My Decameron, with all its incidence of amativeness, is a breeding-nest of poets. Age cannot wither, nor custom stale, La Fontaine's infinite variety. But I take such books as these, as I take all such mental food, *cum grano salis*, a pinch of which keeps each from corruption. Even the fly-blown Gautier looks well, cold and inedible, garnished with Style's fresh parsley. But I have never found that what my teeth nibble at has any power to pollute my immortal part. I must stand on the earth, with Montaigne and Rabelais, but does that prevent me flying heavenward with Jean Paul, or walking the mountain-tops with the Shepherd of Rydal? Inspection of the dung-heaps and slaughter-houses with Jonathan Swift and Zola only makes me more anxious to get away with Rousseau to the peaceful height where the Savoyard Vicar prays. By evil only shall ye distinguish good, says the Master; yea, and by the husks shall ye know the grain.

The man who says that a book has power to pollute his soul, ranks his soul lower than a book. I rank mine infinitely higher.

In his generally admirable study, recently published, entitled 'Robert Buchanan, the Poet of Revolt,' Mr. Archibald Stodart-Walker says of his subject that, to the end, he preserved 'an almost childish sensitiveness to criticism, and a fanatical hatred to . . . . critical injustice.' The second of these allegations is perfectly true; the first is a curiously wrong-headed statement, proceeding as it does from the pen of a writer who was for some years one of Buchanan's personal friends. As a matter of fact, I have never met a man more serenely indifferent to criticism, merely as criticism, than was Buchanan. That he waged eternal war with the motley mob of gentlemen of the Press who chronicle and criticise the current literature of the day is, of course, matter of literary history; but the motive of his polemical activity is to be sought in the second of Mr. Stodart-Walker's statements, not in the first. Buchanan hated 'critical' as he hated all other forms of injustice, and as he hated ignorance, arrogance, presumption, bad faith, and tawdry, sham enthusiasm, of which elements latter-day criticism is so largely compact. Elsewhere, Mr. Stodart-Walker says, 'There is a deadly want of the sense of humour in attacking criticism as a whole.' The statement is challengeable, merely as it stands, for the entire history of criticism—even criticism as written by men of large powers and wide culture—is little more than a record of the stupid injustice with which the world at large has received its greatest and its best. And criticism 'as she is wrote' to-day is

little more and little else than an impertinence and a darkening of counsel. Among the thousands of newspapers published in Great Britain there are few which do not employ the services of a 'critic,' and, viewed in the light of that simple fact, criticism, 'as a whole,' is reduced to an absurdity, inasmuch as the writer capable of dealing adequately with any book worth noticing at all is almost as rare a phenomenon as the writer capable of producing such a book. Nor is mere incapacity the worst feature of modern criticism —it becomes easily tolerable when set beside the cynical defiance of mere common intellectual honesty which is the stock-in-trade of so many of the critical tribe. It is a matter of sad fact that—with the possible exception of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who, despite his many vulgarisms of manner and the flat banality of his outlook upon life, has real force and fine literary power—there is not a contemporary English author alive to-day under the age of sixty who approaches the first rank of excellence; yet, to judge by the current criticism of the newspapers and reviews we should believe that England was groaning in a positive plethora of literary genius. We have been gravely informed—and expected to believe—that Mr. Rider Haggard was the superior of the elder Dumas, that the cherry-stone *chef d'œuvres* of the late Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson had quite hid from sight the granite monoliths which bear witness to the mighty mallet-hand of Scott, that Mr. George Moore is 'a greater Zola,' that Mr. Kipling is a 'greater Dickens,'

that Mr. Henry James eclipses Thackeray, that in Mr. Stephen Phillips we have a dramatic poet who unites the excellences of Sardou and Tennyson, Milton and Dumas *père*. When the late Hugh Conway died, I read a sonnet in a professedly literary journal—I refrain from naming the journal for fear of possible error—in which he was compared to a 'thunder-smitten eagle!' There is probably hardly a journal in England bearing the date of the day on which I write these words which is not proclaiming as 'a masterpiece' some tawdry performance whose author's name, six months hence, it will require an effort of memory to recall. A century ago, in the early days of 'Blackwood's' and the 'Quarterly,' he was the greatest critic who was foulest in insult, most careless of decency, who had stabbed most reputations, who had inspired most despair in the breast of budding talent. Those bad old days have vanished, and to-day the greatest critic is he whose benevolently microscopic eye can detect the greatest number of 'geniuses' among the heterogeneous mob whose crude prose and cruder verse replenish the shelves of the circulating library. *En revanche*, it was only at the moment of Robert Browning's death that the Press, with anything like unanimity, hailed him for what he was—one of the greatest and most certainly enduring glories of English literature. Buchanan's statement that 'Browning's life was darkened by constant neglect and infinite detraction;' and that, 'if it had not been for the efforts of a small body of devoted worshippers, who preached

Browningese in spite of endless ridicule, he would scarcely have been heard of by the great public,' is the simple statement of a simple truth. 'Again and again, when he was issuing his works of thought and imagination, he was informed that it was a Poet's duty, not to instruct, but to amuse, his generation. A leading critical authority compared him to a noisy and mannered "Auctioneer." He was requested to favour the world with light performances, suitable for the suburban reciter and drawing-room entertainer. Since he was an eager man among men, *en rapport* with everything human, he was described as a worldling and a diner-out. Suddenly, on his death, the world discovered that he was a sublime person, a great person. Column upon column was written in his praise by gentlemen who had scarcely read one of his works. "He was great," was the cry, "bury him at Westminster." And scarcely was he cold when it was deeply regretted that he missed wearing the laurel, still worn, we Poets thank God, by the Galahad of modern Poesy.' And he—the good and great Tennyson—how had the current criticism of his early days received *him?* As 'a new star in the milky-way of poetry,' of which 'Johnny Keats' was a specimen-luminary! It was only when Tennyson assumed the laurel, 'greener from the brows' of Wordsworth—himself too the subject of 'constant neglect and infinite detraction'—that the critical snobs recognised his value. Hermann Melville—

Name
The surges trumpet into fame—

the 'Yankee-Greek,' greatest and best of all writers of the sea, years ago broke his pen, swearing never more to write a line; sick of the futile struggle against the platitudinous mediocrities bepuffed by the newspaper critic. 'Imagine this Titan silenced,' said Buchanan, 'and the book-shops flooded with the illustrated magazines!' George Meredith, the possessor of the widest and acutest intellect which has ever bent itself to the production of prose fiction, was grey before our critical *ciceroni* mentioned—or apparently knew—his name. Criticism, 'as a whole,' has sought to atone for insulting or neglecting these men, together with Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and James Thomson, by discovering an earth-shaking portent in 'our school-room classic, Stevenson,' and by deifying the author of 'Herod.'

That there was a spice of personal feeling in Buchanan's frequent and furious onslaughts on the current criticism of his day is true enough. He would have been something more than mortal man had it been otherwise. It would be a task as barren as distasteful to burrow in the sarcophagi of out-of-date newspapers for specimens of the malicious detraction and spiteful stupidity with which hordes of anonymous scribblers greeted his work for many years. He scored a sweet and decisive revenge about the year 1873, in which he published his two poems, 'St. Abe and His Seven Wives,' and 'White Rose and Red.' Both volumes appeared anonymously, and both were received with roars of applause by journals

which, till that date, had never failed to stigmatise their author as 'a pretentious poetaster,' 'a dullard,' 'a madman,' and a condemned Scotsman. As both were American in subject and story, and possessed moreover a certain carefully maintained Transatlantic literary flavour, they were generally ascribed to James Russell Lowell—one of the few writers of real value for whom the contemporary Press had much enthusiasm. One incident in this business afforded Buchanan a great amount of justifiably malicious satisfaction. A leading London daily sent a representative to the publisher of 'St. Abe' (Mr. Strahan) with a proof of a highly laudatory review of two columns in length, to ask—in strict confidence, of course—whether the popular belief was true, and Lowell was really the author of the book. Mr. Strahan, meticulously faithful to his pledge of secrecy, declined to answer 'Yea' or 'Nay;' *and no notice at all of the poem appeared in the columns of the inquisitive journal!* Small wonder that, when a man with such an experience fell foul of the critical scribes he threw a little extra muscle into the strokes of the dog-whip. But that Buchanan was personally sensitive to criticism, printed or spoken, is a quite mistaken idea. He hailed a critical misstatement or stupidity with positive joy, because it gave him a chance of replying to it, and so afforded an opportunity for additional exploitation of his idea. He fell foul of puffery of bad work and of neglect of good work because, as Mr. Stodart-Walker puts it, he hated critical injustice, and because nothing gave

him greater pleasure than to puncture an overblown reputation—except to vindicate neglected talent. Two of his utterances in this connexion are memorable, because they are richly typical of the man who made them. 'I have my own opinion of myself,' he once remarked in the course of conversation. 'It is a lower one than people might fancy, but it suffices.' And on another occasion, in answer to a phrase of condolence regarding a bitter attack upon one of his books, he wrote, 'My soul will survive in my poetry, and can take care of itself.' Sensitiveness to criticism is, I fancy, generally allied with spiritual weakness of some sort, and especially with vanity. It is the intimate curse of the man who takes himself more seriously than the ideas he has to express. A man conscious of having something to say worth the world's hearing will pretty generally be prepared, in Buchanan's own phrase, for 'the neglect of the idle and the misconstruction of the impatient.'* 'My dear Doctor,' said tough old Johnson to the weeping Goldsmith, 'what man is the worse for being called Holofernes?' There was a strong resemblance between the characters of Johnson and Buchanan. Both were hard hitters, strenuous fighters for ideas they believed to be true and necessary to be expressed; both were free from malice because it was fundamentally to settle the great question, '*What* is right?' and not the infinitely little question, '*Who*

* 'The Outcast.' Epistle Dedicatory.

is right?' that they wrote and argued. Johnson himself had not a more robust contempt for that puerile vanity which makes 'intellect' an excuse for any weakness or any meanness in the mind of the fribble who flatters himself that 'intellect' is the gift in which he is especially rich. 'I have never yet discovered,' wrote Buchanan, 'in myself, or in any man, any gift which entitles me to despise the meanest of my fellows.'*

> To love the worst, to feel
> The least is even as I—

to claim no exemption from common labour or common duty on the ground of superior intelligence, but rather to demand that a higher intellectuality should be the corollary of a loftier moral sense—this was Buchanan's creed. It was the creed he imported not merely into his daily life, it partly furnishes the explanation of his huge literary activity. 'I have not escaped the charge of selling my birthright for a mess of pottage; of gaining my bread by hodman's labour, when I might have been sitting empty-stomached on Parnassus. . . . . My errors, however, have arisen from excess of human sympathy, from ardour of human activity, rather than from any great love of the loaves and fishes. Lacking the pride of intellect, I have by superabundant activity tried to prove myself a man among men, not a mere *littérateur*. . . . . So I have stooped to hodman's work

* 'The Outcast.' Epistle Dedicatory.

occasionally, mainly because I cannot pose in the god-like manner of your lotus eaters. I have not humoured my reputation. I have thought no work undignified which did not convert me into a Specialist or a Prig. I have written for all men and in all moods. But the birthright which belongs to all Poets has never been offered by me in any market, and my manhood has never been stained by any sham hate or sham affection.'

Infinite as are the points of diversity between the poetical literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century and that of all preceding epochs, there is one among them which the unborn reader will find supreme in interest above all others—the intrusion, into the poetic field, of the polemist and theologian. England has been described as the native land of paradox, but among all the paradoxes discoverable in her history there is none stranger than the indifference of most of her great poets to the theological struggles whose fluctuations and developments have gone so far towards making up her national history. It is not, of course, surprising that Chaucer and his predecessors and contemporaries should be free from any expression of theological bias. That Chaucer was a man of fixed and humble piety is made certain by every serious page he ever wrote. Being for his day a man of wide culture, he was probably well read in the current divinity. But, in Chaucer's day, there was only one theology, and it was accepted by all

men. If any manifestation of the spirit of Lollardism ever came his way, it left him untouched so far as is discoverable from his writings, and most probably left him untouched altogether, for he does not seem to have been of the kind of stuff of which, in any age, the polemist is made. The good green earth, and what grew and moved thereon, was enough for him, as it was enough for his unlettered neighbours, the farmer in his furrow and the cobbler in his stall. Life, intellectually and morally, was life reduced to its simplest terms. The morning prayer, the daily toil, the well-earned sleep which was the guerdon of their labour, filled men's lives. They accepted, with the simplicity of children, the teaching of their pastors, that life was a probation, that he who bore its labours and its trials with patience and submission would be wafted on the wings of angels to an eternal paradise, that the wicked and rebellious would go to people a real objective hell. It was all so simple:—

> The world was rich in man and maid,
> With fair horizons bound;
> This whole wide earth of light and shade
> Came out a perfect round,

and heaven itself was only a little beyond the sunset clouds.

> Le bon Dieu, gravely interfering
> In all humanity's affairs,
> Bending his kind grey head, and hearing
> The orphan's cry, the widow's prayers,

was, to them, as actual and real a person as his vicegerent on earth, 'the Pope that dwelled in Rome,' and not much further off. Chaucer died in 1400, and literature slept for a century, to awaken, in common with every other manifestation of intellectual energy, amid the glorious turmoil of the Renaissance; and it is at this point in history that the theological indifferentism of our great poets becomes so truly remarkable. For in no field was the human spirit in the sixteenth century more active than in the domain of theology. The geographical isolation of England made us somewhat slow to catch the contagion of new religious thought. The healthy conservatism and hatred of extremes joined with the fundamental tolerance and bonhomie which are among the best points of our national character to make the struggle between new and old at once less bitter and less prolonged than it was in some continental countries; yet the fight, while it lasted, was sharp and bitter enough. But, while Henry and Edward and Mary and Elizabeth hanged and burned and racked and tortured; and while the Continent, from Spain to Friesland, was torn by a strife as deadly as it has ever witnessed; the Muse of English poesy still dreamed on in her own quiet fairyland, as unmoved by the ghastly turmoil as Proserpine in her garden. Neither politics nor theology nor war—for so long a time almost interchangeable terms—stirred her from her golden calm. The glories of a new-found world enriched her

metaphors and coloured her vocabulary, but, though all England was shrieking horror over the American devilries of the Spanish freebooters, she had no word of pity for outraged humanity. The soil of Holland was like a sponge blood-soaked with the life-stream of thousands of the martyrs of the faith which England had adopted, and Holland's and humanity's greatest and purest hero was meeting with splendid courage and defeating with incredible success the tremendous armaments of Spain, our bitterest enemy, with whom we also were girding ourselves to come to inevitable death-grips; but martyrdom and heroism and the fear, which all men felt, of Spanish tyranny, left this strange sprite unmoved. There is nothing so amazing in all intellectual history as this complete aloofness from every most passionate interest of humanity which was displayed at that epoch by the great poets of England. Who, that was ignorant of the date of Shakespeare, could guess, from any internal evidence disclosed by his writings, the political storm and stress by which his life must have been surrounded; or that his fellow-citizens were being racked, mutilated and hanged for differences of theological opinion? Unless—which it is impossible to believe—a score of passages in his plays are mere fulsome rant meant to tickle the groundlings, Shakespeare was an ardent patriot. It would be an even greater absurdity to suppose that he had neither the heart to sympathise with the aborigines of America and the Protestants of Holland, nor the modicum of political sagacity to foresee the

possibility of curses as dire as those from which they suffered falling upon his own friends and neighbours. He *must* have sympathised with other nations, he *must* have feared for the country he loved so well. He must passionately have desired the triumph of liberty and the downfall of oppression. Yet where, in the entire bulk of the work we owe to him, do we find the smallest indication that he had ever so much as heard the name of Montezuma, of William the Silent, of Luther, on the one hand, or of Charles the Fifth or Philip the Second on the other? His treatment of the clerical element in his plays is curiously mild; the priestly figures which cross his stage from time to time, 'Pandulph, of fair Milan Cardinal,' Wolsey and Campeius and his friars, might, for any internal evidence yielded by the style of portraiture, have been painted by the hand of the most fervent Romanist. Yet he was almost contemporary with Alexander the Sixth and Cæsar Borgia, and actually contemporary with Cardinal Granvelle, the priestly minister of the insane and puerile cruelties of Philip; a trio, not merely of the most unworthy prelates, but of the most bestial criminals the world has seen. Were these men and their acts never discussed at the Mermaid, never canvassed in the tiring-room of the Globe? One might think so, from Shakespeare's public silence concerning them. And what is true of Shakespeare in this particular is true of his contemporaries without exception.

Milton would appear to have been the first English

poet of real importance to break through the bonds of this strange reticence, and to bring the light of the poetic intelligence to bear upon the problems of his day. His prose 'Areopagitica' and his noble sonnet on the persecution of the Protestants of Piedmont have never been surpassed as instances of the incommensurable value of the poetic-speculative treatment of the 'burning questions' of which every generation has its share. With him, poetry ceased to be the mere idle pastime it had been, the poet was no longer only the denizen and painter of a fairy world removed from every vital interest of human daily life. Stony as was the ground on which his seed was fated to fall, ill-fitted as was the atmosphere of the Restoration to encourage loftiness of thought or freedom of expression, the seed was sown, and its own innate vitality kept it from utter corruption or complete sterility. The plant was fostered by the literary harlot, Dryden, and the fungoid growth of affectation which overspread it during the period of Queen Anne could not kill it. We smile over the strings of prim and polished aphorisms in which Pope expressed his tea-table system of theology and ethics, but his tinselled and beribboned candlestick served at least to keep the flame alight, and it burned serenely in the pages of Cowper, and through that dreary gap in the succession of genius in which Hayley and Pye and Crabbe were hailed as poets, to spring to a vivid blaze in the opening years of the nineteenth century. Keats is the only indubitably great poet of that epoch who

was content to dwell in the old celestial lubber-land in which Shakespeare and Spenser idled away their time. Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Burns—even the dreamy and unpractical Coleridge, descended into the political and theological arenas, and fought in the ranks of humanity, side by side with common men. Buchanan's dictum, already quoted, that 'a Poet is a Prophet and a Propagandist, or nothing,' is only an exaggeration of what is to-day a universal sentiment. The mere idle melodist can never hope again to take rank with the truly great poets. We have seen this illustrated in the career of one of the most gifted singers of the century—Algernon Charles Swinburne. Great in imaginative faculty, rich in melody, a superb verbal technician, he has failed in holding a place among the great singers of his time, because, alone among them, he has had no gospel to proclaim, no message to deliver. He ranks, as a poet, as Gounod ranks as a musician. Set beside Browning, Tennyson, and Buchanan, his stature seems to dwindle to something less than its true and fair proportion, as Gounod's delicious melodies seem thin and vapid beside the graver strains of Beethoven and Wagner.

At the beginning of the present century there was prevalent a superstition, which found its most lasting and familiar expression in a famous passage in Macaulay's 'Essay on Milton,' that the spirit of science and the spirit of poetry were and must be inter-destructive, that a civilisation based upon science must necessarily be incapable of producing great

poetry. That superstition has long since been abandoned, and it is now among the most widespread of critical commonplaces that out of the fusion of Poetry and Science will arise a literature nobler than any the world has yet possessed. That conclusion, we may be pardoned for thinking, is one that might surely have been arrived at by the *à priori* method of reasoning. All good influences, all forces which make for righteousness, are friendly one to another, and must needs work in harmony. If Science be the bread of life, as it is, Poetry is its air and sunlight, and, as the body does not live by bread alone, so the soul will for all time demand that lighter and less tangible nutriment, which only imagination can supply. Shakespeare possibly believed that the swallows which nested in the eaves of his father's house in summer time took refuge from the winter's cold under the waters of the horse-pond. He possibly believed that the witches he drew in 'Macbeth,' the fairies which peopled his 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and the spectres which broke the sleep of Richard and haunted the midnight watch of Marcellus had their genuine counterparts in the actual economy of nature. Tennyson was a scientific ornithologist, to whom the horsepond-hibernation theory would hardly appeal, but nevertheless he wrote about the swallow one of the sweetest lyrics in the language. He probably had no belief in ghosts, but he used them as powerfully as if he had, in the last act of 'Harold.' The mind of man is tenacious of all that is of mental or imaginative value, and

even the most modern of readers is content to go back for a while into the region of ghosts and ghouls in the company of any guide who has the art to make his spooks sufficiently convincing. Science and imagination can never be really inimical one to another.

Macaulay was a young man when he propounded the theory just briefly discussed; he had grown old when a vastly more venerable bugbear was disinterred from among the ashes of the past, and the cry rang shrilly from all the churches and conventicles of Europe and America, that Science was killing Religion. It was certainly killing much that passed by that name, and the holocausts of superstitions by which its march was marked were no doubt very terrible to that numerous body to whom the sanctity of superstition meant daily bread. The militant Atheist, who would appear at times to be a sillier—and even less decent—person than his enemy, the dogmatic religionist, fell into the same obvious pitfall, and from the depths of his ignorance clamoured his glee in the 'destruction' of Religion as loudly as the priest and the parson wailed their grief and terror. There is an illuminating passage regarding this matter in Buchanan's article on 'Free Thought in America' (*A Look Round Literature*), àpropos of the utterances of that once notorious atheistic lecturer, Colonel Robert Ingersoll :—

> Colonel Ingersoll is very fond of proclaiming his admiration for the great scientific teachers of his age ; but in reality he is as far away in spirit from the thought of Darwin as from the

vision of Shakespeare, as obtuse to the scientific problems as to the pathetic poetic fallacy. Religion is the grave, elder daughter of Poetry, and to understand religious questions a man must have the heart of a poet. Science, too, is the daughter of Poetry ; indeed, her youngest born ; while calmer and colder than her mother, she has the same far-away, rapt look into the heaven of heavens ; and her teaching is for poetic hearts also, not for those who confound her with her sordid and hard-working handmaid, Invention. Science ranges the universe, touches the farthest suns, reaches the farthest cloud confines, and cries honestly and loudly, 'Thus far—no farther—here I pause ;' and then even she begins to *dream*. Invention squats on the ground, sets her little water-wheel, lights her little lamp, pieces her mechanical puzzles, does homely work, delightful and useful to everybody. But Invention-worship is fetish-worship, and Colonel Ingersoll is a fetish-worshipper—that is to say, an individual exactly at the savage state where neither religion nor science begins.

'The last word of science,' said George Henry Lewes to Buchanan on one occasion, when the latter had asked if that 'last word' would be one of negation and despair, 'will not be spoken for many a century yet. Who can guess what it will be?' Meanwhile, and pending that far-off consummation, the wise man who gives himself time to think will arrive at the comforting conclusion that, no more than Science and Imagination, can Science and Religion be truly inimical. Science is no horrible Djinn, solidified from the smoke of our nineteenth-century retorts, like the imprisoned demon of the 'Arabian Nights' from the vapour of his bottle. It is coeval with humanity, and therefore coeval with Religion itself. Some Religion Man must always have had,

there is no race so low in the scale as to have none at all. *Some* Science Man must always have possessed —how otherwise should he have lived at all? Religion is eternal—the holocaust of creeds leaves her untouched, nay, it has imparted to her new strength and vitality, as the lopping away of vegetable parasites quickens the vigour of a forest tree.

I have already set in juxtaposition the names of the three poets of the Victorian era who are, as I believe, securest of posthumous regard—the names of Tennyson, Browning, and Buchanan—and I have tried at least to adumbrate the reasons which prompt me to that selection. The conditions of the contest for the crown of poetic supremacy have changed from what they were in former times. That crown is awarded no longer to him who is merely the sweetest singer of his generation—otherwise the public vote would place it on the head of Mr. Swinburne. A sweet singer, a *poet* in the old restricted sense, every candidate who aspires to wear it must needs still—and always—be. But he must be very much beside and beyond that. He must combine, with the purely poetic gift, the gifts of the historian, the sociologist, the philosopher, the theologian, the legislative reformer. He must absorb and render back the desires and aspirations of his generation, and indicate the road that it must walk in its progress towards their realisation; his utterance must be not only a sweet sound in men's ears, but a guiding light unto their feet. And it is because the three poets I have named

combined each in his individual person and expressed each in his proper work, the gifts here dwelt upon, that their influence on the minds and lives of men is certain to endure.

The critical superstition of Macaulay's earlier days, that Science and Poetry are necessarily antagonistic, had, and still has to many minds, a surface plausibility. The poetic and religious spirits are more nearly akin than the poetic and scientific, and if science necessarily ended in atheism, the Poets would never have had much to say to it. An atheistic poet was, a generation ago, almost a contradiction in terms. The Poet felt with Browning's 'Bishop Blougram':—

> What can I gain on the denying side?
> Ice makes no conflagration.

There was but one genuine and indubitable English poet who ever went so far as even to mistake himself for an atheist—Shelley. And if the 'Adonais' is of any authority, Shelley, towards the end of his life, had drifted at least as far as Theism:—

> The one remains, the many change and pass,
> God for all time abides, earth's shadows flee—

and long after Shelley's time, and even to the present day, the poets who have believed that science had robbed them of God, have proclaimed themselves the most desolate of orphans. The melancholy end of Alfred de Musset was as clearly traceable to the assumed impossibility of religious belief as to any

one of the more frequently cited causes. His pages are full of laments for the lost Fatherhood, and he attacked Voltaire with a virulence rarely lavished on any but a contemporary enemy.

> Dors-tu content, ô Voltaire, et ton hideux sourire
> Voltige-t-il encore sur tes os décharnés ?
> Ton siècle, dit-on, était trop jeune pour te lire—
> Le nôtre doit te plaire, et tes hommes sont nés.
> La Mort devait t'attendre avec impatience
> Pendant quatre-vingt ans que tu lui fis ta cour.

And again :

> Et que nous reste-t-il, à nous, les déicides ?
> Pour qui travailliez-vous, démolisseurs stupides,
> Lorsque vous disséquiez le Christ sur son autel ?

And de Musset's great and strangely neglected contemporary, Auguste Barbier, was even less polite to Voltaire's memory, when he called him

> Singe assis sur les décombres—
> Marteau encore brulant de démolition.

Baudelaire complained :

> Je suis né trop tard dans un siècle trop vieux—

feeling, as a Godless poet of his time must have felt, like a worshipper with his hands full of incense who can find no altar whereon to lay it. Verlaine, in his unregenerate days, ranked himself with as much sadness as pride among

> les suprèmes poètes,
> Qui vénérons les dieux et qui n'y croyons pas.

The crushing sense of the orphaned condition of humanity drove James Thomson to the fallacious comfort of alcohol, and sent him to the grave. It is curious to remember, in this connexion, that Voltaire wrote the wistful and charming quatrain:

> On a banni les démons et les fées,
> Le raisonneur tristement s'accrédite:
> On court, hélas, après la verité,
> Ah, croyez-moi, l'erreur a son mérite.

It is even more curious to remember that he penned the lines—

> Le passé n'est pour nous qu'un triste souvenir;
> Le présent est affreux, s'il n'est point d'avenir,
> Si la nuit du tombeau détruit l'être qui pense—

but the lines are his, none the less, and would seem to indicate that 'the great architect of ruin' knew moments in which he doubted the sanity and justice of the task he performed with so terrible a completeness. This fear of the destructive tendencies of science—a fear which blinded men of less clear mental insight to its constructive value—is strongly evident in the work of both Browning and Tennyson. Both were ardent students of the most advanced thought of their time, and each, in his fashion, fought in the ranks of religious conservatism.

It is quite a common thing, even to-day, to hear Browning spoken of as 'a Christian poet.' That claim was made, with obvious sincerity, by Richard

Hutton in the columns of the *Spectator*, and quite recently I re-read the article, which has been re-published by Hutton's literary executor in a volume entitled 'Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought.'* That claim seems as strange and as wildly untenable as any claim well could be. That the average reader —perhaps even the average reader of Browning— should make or admit it is no great wonder. But that a man of Hutton's critical capacity should be the victim of such a delusion is curious indeed. Hutton admits that 'Browning was very jealous of its being supposed that he accepted literally the cut-and-dried formulas of any Christian Church.' A few lines further on, he continues, 'In "Saul," in "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," in "The Ring and the Book," and fifty other poems, Browning has endeavoured to depict the very heart of his own faith, and of course he prefers his own mode of indicating that faith to that of the narrow-minded Evangelical preacher, or the technical scholastic theologian, or the cold rationalistic critic. No doubt,' Hutton goes on, 'he told Mr. Buchanan that in his (Mr. Buchanan's) sense of the term, he did not profess to be a Christian; but, as Mrs. Sutherland Orr puts it, we want to know exactly what meaning Mr. Buchanan had put upon the term, before we can attach any great importance to this asserted denial.'

It is strange, to say the least of it, that Mrs.

* Messrs. Macmillan (Eversleigh Series).

Sutherland Orr should have made such a remark, and stranger still that Hutton should have repeated it. For, if one thing in Buchanan's theological scheme is more plain and explicit than another, it is the scientific rigidity of his definition of the word 'Christian.' Christianity, Buchanan was never tired of repeating, is a number of dogmas, accurately summed up in the Credo taught to children. Do you believe in the Immaculate Conception and in the efficacy of the Atonement? If so, you are a Christian. If not, you may be anything else you choose to call yourself, but a Christian you are not. You may love and admire the character of Christ, you may preach and practise the virtues He extolled, but nothing short of the definite acceptance of the dogmas of the Godhead and the Redemption can qualify you to stand within the Christian pale.* It was in that plain sense that Browning understood Buchanan's categorical inquiry, 'Are you not,

* Some six or seven years ago, Mr. Richard Le Gallienne gave Buchanan an additional chance of insisting on this hard-and-fast definition by the publication of his book, 'The Religion of a Literary Man,' wherein, having carefully ruled himself out of acceptance of any sort of dogma whatsoever, he described himself as 'essentially a Christian;' after which feather-headed pronouncement he went off, as Buchanan said, 'to tipple and flirt in the society of that arch-materialist, Omar Khayyam.' Mr. Le Gallienne's claim to stand within the Christian fold provoked the elder poet to the committal of a bit of rollicking verse, which appeared originally in the *Star* newspaper, and was afterwards incorporated in 'The Devil's Sabbath' (*The New Rome*).

> If I desire to end my days at peace with all theologies,
> To win the penny-a-liner's praise, the Editor's apologies,

then, a Christian?' And it was with a full sense of the meaning his reply would bear in Buchanan's mind that Browning replied—'thundered' is Buchanan's expression—'No!' And, in the circumstance that Buchanan, knowing Browning's work so well as he did, should have felt the need to ask such a question at all; and in that other circumstance, that, with Browning's reply on record before him, Hutton could still, sincerely (as I have already said), and with any chance of finding agreement with the view, still claim Browning as a Christian poet, lies matter for interesting reflection, as we shall presently perceive.

Browning wrote much on theological subjects. His early education, his serious cast of mind, the very character of his genius, all tended to make theological speculation interesting to him. Even the most meagre citation of the passages in which he treated of the eternal mysteries and of men's guesses

---

Don't think I mean to cast aside the Christian's pure beatitude,
Or cease my vagrant steps to guide with Christian prayer and platitude.
No, I'm a Christian out and out, and claim the kind appellative
Because, however much I doubt, my doubts are simply Relative;
For this is law, and this I teach, tho' some may think it vanity,
That whatsoever creed men preach, 'tis Essential Christianity!

In Miracles I don't believe, or in Man's Immortality—
The Lord was laughing in his sleeve, save when he taught Morality;
He saw that flesh is only grass, and (though you grieve to learn it) he
Knew that the personal Soul must pass and never reach Eternity.
In short, the essence of his creed was gentle nebulosity
Compounded for a foolish breed who gaped at his verbosity;
And this is law, and this I teach, tho' you may think it vanity,
That whatsoever creed men preach, 'tis Essential Christianity!

at their meaning would absorb a quite disproportionate amount of space, and I shall select as my field of quotation those only of his poems which contain the fullest and directest expression of his attitude towards the question of the divine birth and ambassadorship of Christ. Among these, Hutton mentions 'Saul,' 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day,' and 'The Ring and the Book.' Let us examine them.

'Saul' contains one passage, and only one, which, taken apart from its context and from the entire atmosphere of the poem, can possibly be regarded as an affirmation of the divinity of Christ.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it! O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love, and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

Taken as an isolated statement, nothing could be completer, nothing more splendidly fervent, as a proclamation of the godhead of Christ. But it cannot be so taken. It must be examined as part of a whole, and so examined it ceases to be a confession of personal faith on the part of its writer, and becomes a mere bit of literature. For the utterance is dramatic, and the speaker is not Robert Browning, but David the shepherd minstrel. It is of no more authority as evidence that its author was an Orthodox Christian than Tennyson's

'Tithonus' could be in supporting the thesis that the late Laureate was an Hellenic Pantheist. And precisely the same thing may be said of the passages which were in Hutton's mind when he spoke of 'The Ring and the Book.' They also are purely dramatic, and Browning's own personal theology finds less expression in the scholarly subtleties of the good Pope Innocent than in the simple, childlike trustfulness of poor Pompilia, praying on her hospital bed for the wretch who murdered her:—

> We shall not meet in this world or the next,
> But where will God be absent? In His light
> Is healing, in His shadow, healing too—
> Let Guido touch the shadow, and be healed.

Before passing on to 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day,' let us look for a moment at some other of his theological pronouncements. It has been stated that 'only a Christian could have written "A Death in the Desert."' The only meaning this statement can be taken as bearing is that nobody but a Christian could have felt the fervid love for and belief in Christ which Browning expresses by the lips of the dying John. But in this poem we must again notice that it is dramatic, not lyrical. In the body of the poem it is the voice of the Apostle, in the appended passage it is the voice of Pamphylax the Antiochene. And in that addendum there is a statement, more direct and forceful than any made by John upon the other side, of the difficulty, to a mere human, logical

intelligence, of accepting the splendid promises of Christ :—

> If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
> Mere man, the first and best, but nothing more—
> Account Him, for reward of what He was,
> Now and forever, wretchedest of all.
> For see ; Himself conceived of life as love,
> Conceived of love as what must enter in,
> Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved :
> Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.
> Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.
> But by this time are many souls set free,
> And very many still retained alive :
> Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,
> Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)
> See if, for every finger of thy hands,
> There be not found, that day the world shall end,
> Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word
> That He will grow incorporate with each,
> With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,
> Groom for each bride ! Can a mere man do this ?
> Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.
> Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
> Or lost !

There is a direct, a terrible simplicity in this exposition of doubt which is quite absent from John's proclamation of belief. That proclamation is subtle, ingenious, eloquent to a high degree—the very perfection of polemics; but in the force of its appeal to human understanding it is no more comparable to the passage I have quoted than is a flight of thistledown to a volley of grapeshot. True, the addendum has itself an addendum, in the words completing the last

line of the poem—'But 'twas Cerinthus that is lost.' Yet those few words—even if I am wrong in taking them also as a dramatic utterance added by some later commentator than 'Pamphylax the Antiochene'—are little to set against the appallingly plain statement of the difficulty of belief. And if they are to be taken as expressing Browning's personal adherence to Christian dogma, all that can be said is that they form the only definite proclamation of that adherence to be found in the whole range of his poetical work.

'Christmas Eve,' and, in a less measure, 'Easter Day,' are certainly Browning's most important contributions to theological literature. They owe something of that importance to the fact that they are the longest of his works which treat of theological ideas, and most of it to the other fact that they are personal, not dramatic, utterances. Let us see on which side they testify most strongly. In 'Christmas Eve,' the poet is transported in his trance to the lecture room in Gottingen, and listens to the address delivered by 'the hawk-nosed, high-cheekboned Professor,' who, after demolishing the divine claims of Christ by a cannonade of Teutonic-scientific criticism, tells his audience that the 'myth' thus pulverised still leaves, 'for residuum,'

> A man! a right, true man, however,
> Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour;
> Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
> To his disciples, for rather believing
> He was just omnipotent and omniscient,

As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition—which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable—

at which point the poet follows his divine Guide out into the darkness, and, as he flies through the air in His wake, muses on the Professor's lecture. 'Thus much of Christ does he (the Professor) reject?' asks Browning—

And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame evade it?
Have Wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, his speech, who made it?
How comes it that, for one found able
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which, upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God—should take another view

Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race!

* * * * *

The goodness—how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and whence flinch—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration,
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.

If this passage can be accused of obscurity, it is only of such obscurity as even cultured people who have not made themselves familiar with Browning's occasional jerkiness of utterance often complain of—the obscurity is merely verbal. That small difficulty conquered, the thought of this passage is as simple, plain, and direct as thought can be. And it is a

denunciatory criticism of the claims of Christ, even to the measure of merely human greatness which the Atheistic Professor left to him, to which most other diatribes of the kind in modern literature are mere child's play. It says, with a plainness which leaves no chance for quibbling, that if Christ were not God, he was little more than nothing; it grudges him even a place among great ethical teachers. 'Ah, but,' you can hear the Christian claimant of Browning replying, 'Browning goes on to reconstruct the Divine Figure. Read the end of the poem.' You can read the end of the poem. You can read it with a microscope, and there is absolutely no reconstruction of the divinity of Christ to be found in it. It is merely nebulous rhetoric. It is impossible to print here the following and concluding passages, which make some hundreds of lines. Nor is it necessary. The onus of proof lies on the critics who claim Browning as a Christian poet. Let one among them cite, either from 'Christmas Eve' or from any other of his utterances, any passage on their side as plain, direct, logical, and indubitable in meaning as those quoted in support of the contrary affirmation.

In the course of his essay Hutton says, 'It is as plain as vivid imaginative expressions can make it, that if Browning was not in some very deep and true sense a Christian—a believer even in the divinity of Christ—his language is elaborately adapted rather to conceal and misrepresent his mind than to express it'—a remark which seems to me a little shallow and lacking in critical insight. There is no need to conclude that

Browning was so untrue to his genius and manhood as to palter with us in a double sense on the gravest of all human problems. I am not defending him from that injurious charge from any sentimental belief that a great brain must needs mean great courage and great honesty. On the contrary, it seems to me that what we call 'great men,' taken in the lump, have been pretty poor specimens of humanity. The simple explanation of Browning's ambiguity in his theological utterances is as follows. He was strongly attracted by theological questions, by the Divine Mysteries, and loved to think and write about them. He believed—passionately, whole-heartedly believed—in God, and in God's personal supervision of the world. About that at least, any shadow of doubt is impossible to any intelligent student of his poetry, and his letters to Elizabeth Barrett testify to it almost on every page. And he would have loved to believe in Christ, to have accepted the Divine Legend in its entirety. But that he could not do, the character of his intelligence, the strain of tough logicality which ran through his mind, forbade it. There was in Browning a dual personality, the poet who longed to believe, the logician who clamoured for absolute demonstration. He had not the heart to attack overtly so beautiful a creed as Christianity, and he could not keep his pen from writing about it. So he found a keen delight in expressing his love for the character of Christ in the form in which it could be expressed most completely—by dramatic utterances put into the mouths of men of

absolute and unquestioning faith. Read in the light of that belief, his work contains a pathetic beauty, an adumbration of the great heart-hunger of our orphaned and sorrowful humanity. There is one dramatic utterance of Browning's in which he did indeed speak his whole heart—the final lines of the 'Epistle' of Karshish, the wandering Arab physician, who had met and talked with Lazarus, the living witness of the miraculous power of Christ.

> The very God! think, Abib, dost thou think?
> So, the All-Great, were the All-loving too—
> So, through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
> Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
> Thou hast no power nor may conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou must love me who have died for thee!'
>
> The madman saith He said so; it is strange.

Karshish, one may say, is the veritable Browning himself, the eager student and close cross-questioner of Nature, hoping that his pryings into natural secrets may one day give him certainty of the existence of some stronger divine sanction than his iron logic will yet permit him to believe in.

But, though Browning cannot be found 'guilty' on the alternative charge which Hutton brought against him—the charge of consciously paltering in his written utterances with what he personally regarded as the gravest of all human problems, there is a minor accusation from which he would have found it difficult

to free himself. The fact remains that many of his readers claim him as a Christian poet, and that such a classification was sufficiently plausible to find endorsement by a man of the critical acumen of Hutton. That Browning refrained from writing, in his own proper person, any word which could be accepted as proclaiming the validity of the Christian hope is in itself enough to acquit him of the grievous stigma of having pandered to popular sentiment, or of *designedly* misleading his readers. But that was not enough. The man who, being asked in private conversation, 'Are you not a Christian?' could 'thunder' so decisive a negative, should not have permitted his sentimental or æsthetic leanings to make so vital a matter at all questionable in his public utterances. This is a point of cardinal importance. It proves in Browning a lack of that completer moral courage exhibited by his two most prominent rivals in the field of poetical polemics, Tennyson and Buchanan, about whose convictions on kindred topics it would be impossible for any reader of average intelligence to harbour the smallest uncertainty. And it has the further disquieting effect of provoking doubt as to whether 'the poet of optimism *par excellence*,' as Browning has been called, was thoroughly sincere in his eternal cry of '*Sursum corda!*' One cannot but ask oneself if it was indeed possible that a man of the world, 'an eager man among men' of whom it was as impossible to predicate ignorance of the actualities of life as lack of intelligence to understand them, should really be so blind to the sin

and misery, the filth and failure, the injustice, the brutality, the hydra-headed horror which dominates existence. His optimism was not merely robust, it was at moments positively impertinent. To read Browning in sickness or in great sorrow or physical suffering—

> when the sensuous frame
> Is racked by pangs that conquer trust;
> And Time, a maniac scattering dust,
> And Life, a Fury slinging flame—

would drive a sensitive organization to stark madness. There are moments when the statement 'God's in his heaven' seems questionable to the staunchest believer, as we know it did at moments even to John Henry Newman. And there are frequent moments when 'All's right with the world!' is a gratuitous insult to common sense and common eyesight. Optimism is no doubt a virtue, of sorts, but pushed too far it becomes, not optimism, but insensibility—to use no harsher word.

Very different was the regard with which Tennyson looked upon the world; far more valuable to heart and brain was the verdict he pronounced on the strange inchoate drama we call 'Life.' An optimist to the end, his optimism, less insistent and less loud than the violent asseveration of Browning, 'All's love and all's law,' brings a more real comfort with it, for we feel that it is based, not on an almost brutal denial of the reality of pain and disappointment, but on a frank recognition of all the phenomena of life.

Tennyson's intellectual courage was far from complete, he was not armed at all points, he made, as we shall see, unjustifiable reservations and claims philosophically inadmissible ; but the great grief of his life was, intellectually, life's greatest boon to him—it forced a naturally reverent and rather timid soul to face and fight 'the spectres of the mind,' and to tell his generation, with a beautiful and noble candour, the progress and the issue of the struggle. He was by far the most powerful advocate of revealed religion produced by the nineteenth century, simply because he brought to his task not merely his consummate literary ability, but so large a share of candour to his opponents; so frank a recognition of much that was true in their teaching; so free a confession of the doubts and difficulties which assailed, but could not kill, his faith in the eternal Fatherhood. He realised, as Browning in his own person certainly never did, the thought which Browning so splendidly expresses by the lips of Bishop Blougram :

> When the fight begins within himself
> A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
> Satan looks up beneath his feet—both tug—
> He's left, himself, i' the middle : the soul wakes
> And grows. Prolong that battle through his life !
> Never leave growing till the life to come.
>
> * * * * *
>
> The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,
> My faith's still greater, then, my faith's enough.

All his life long, though he kept his eyes resolutely

fixed upon the sunlit mountain summits, Tennyson's feet trod the thorny ways of the Valley of the Shadow. Granted foreknowledge of his love for Arthur Hallam and the tragic end of that heroic friendship, 'In Memoriam' might have been prophesied from the pen which wrote 'The Two Voices' and 'Maud.'

> A still small voice spoke unto me—
> 'Thou art so full of misery
> Were it not better not to be?'
>
> * * * * *
>
> A life of nothings, nothing worth,
> From that first nothing ere his birth
> To that last nothing under earth.

He found an answer to the dull murmur within his heart, but the answer was hardly satisfactory, and the spectre of doubt was never finally laid. It reared its head again in 'Maud,' and made of 'the brave o'erhanging firmament, fretted with golden fire' a terrible witness to human insignificance:—

> A sad astrology—the boundless plan
> That made you tyrants in your iron skies,
> Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
> Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
> His nothingness into man.

And we may be certain that when, many years later, he wrote that terrible poem 'Despair,' the utterance was not merely and wholly dramatic, but that, though it probably did not express the mood in which it was

actually written, its bitterness was inspired by memories of many hours of torturing personal doubt.

And the suns of the limitless Universe sparkled and shone in the sky,
Flashing with fires as of God ; but we know that their light was a lie—
Bright as with deathless hope—but, however they sparkled and shone
The dark little worlds running round them were worlds of woe like our own—
No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth below,
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe.

He often felt chilled and homeless in the vastnesses of Time and Space :—

Many an Æon moulded earth before her highest, Man, was born,
Many an Æon too may pass when earth is manless and forlorn,

and at moments they so crushed him that he breaks out with a cry of angry contempt of himself and the impotent race to which he belongs,

What is it all but the trouble of ants, in the gleam of a million million of suns ?

It is impossible not to recognise and admire the courage which goes so far, which does not shrink from posing, squarely and honestly, some of the more powerful reasons for doubt and denial. It is certainly in no carping or malicious spirit that I venture to criticise the faith of such a man, or the processes by which he arrived at that faith. When all possible exceptions and

all fair deductions have been made, the bulk of Tennyson's utterances upon the problems of his century will remain a document of the highest value. He failed to speak the final word — not the final word of a controversy which will probably still be raging when the sun goes out—but the final word which it is within the power of the humblest of us to speak, the final word of individual opinion; because, with that timidity which was one of the few flaws of a conspicuously noble nature, he did not dare to follow his brains, to trust his intelligence in the denial of much which his heart so passionately desired. So deep a student and so reverent a lover of Tennyson as Mr. Masterman is forced to admit so much :—

> Tennyson, in fact, in his treatment of contemporary life around him, directly opposes the principle of Evolution which, in theory, he had accepted. In religious speculation, and in practical affairs, he never did actually launch out into the deep. He always was one of those who hugged the shore, ever directing the prow of his ship towards the illimitable ocean, but ever again seeking shelter under the shadow of the land.*

Mr. Masterman is so valuable a witness that I shall make no apology for quoting rather freely from his book—the most admirable critical utterance regarding Tennyson with which I am acquainted, and one of the most capable and luminous critical exercises in the language. Here, for instance, is a passage which

* 'Tennyson as a Religious Teacher,' by Charles F. G. Masterman.

sheds a penetrating light on much of Tennyson's philosophy :—

Tennyson's first attempts to solve this great problem (the apparent vastness of the Universe and the insignificance of Man) consist of mere affirmation without explanation—affirmation of the reality of self through the reality of love. He deliberately turns away from the immensity of Space, and refuses any longer to contemplate it. I am : I love : this, at least, is certain. . . . . This is the reply of the hero of 'Maud' to the maddening thoughts suggested by his 'sad astrology.'

> But now shine on, and what care I,
> Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl,
> The countercharm of space and hollow sky,
> And do accept my madness, and would die
> To save from one slight shame one simple girl.

* * * * *

But in this first attempt to encounter the problem the human intellect cannot rest satisfied ; it must go forward in an effort to escape from this unsatisfactory dualism, the reality of the macrocosmos without us, the reality of the microcosmos within. The mind incessantly craves for some kind of harmony, and refuses to acquiesce in the discord between these two entities, and so Tennyson was compelled to essay an explanation. He found it in the form of idealism taught by that philosopher who had never wearied of contemplating the sublimity both of the starry heavens without and the moral law within. This was the assertion of the subjective element in space ; that space is not a reality outside our own consciousness, but, at least as apprehended by us, a product of this consciousness itself.

'Space is nothing but the form of all phenomena of the external senses,' says Kant ; 'it is the subjective condition of our sensibility, without which no external intuition is possible

for us;' and again, 'If we drop our subject, or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in Space and Time, nay, Space and Time themselves, would vanish.'

The world as we know it, the whole material universe, Tennyson maintains, is but a vision or a picture in our minds *and the minds of beings possessing organizations similar to our own*. Impressions have rained down upon us from something beyond ourselves; each of us has woven these impressions into a unity, which he terms the Natural World. How different this may be from the real world outside ourselves we cannot at present apprehend; but we can at least emphasise the impossibility of being content with the first naïve view of things, the impossibility of the assertion that this manifestation of consciousness must possess a real tangible existence outside the minds which apprehend it. In this sense it is untrue to affirm that humanity could be removed from the solar system without making any practical difference in the economy of the universe; for if all consciousness were simultaneously to cease, the whole material system would suddenly disappear; 'the great globe itself and all which it inherit' would vanish like a dream, leaving 'not a rack behind.' *

This indeed seems to me to be a case in which

> Physic of metaphysic begs defence,
> And metaphysic calls for aid on sense—

and the call is disregarded. There is, of course, no appeal, in the realm of pure reason, from Kant's pronouncement. Time and Space must be regarded, for purposes of thought, as mere emanations of the human intelligence, mere abstractions, having no necessary—perhaps no probable—relationship to the

* 'Tennyson as a Religious Teacher.'

actual scheme of the universe. But to transplant that idea from its native realm, and to attempt to base upon it a plan of daily action, is impossible. For, if Space and Time are merely human ideas, why should we grant the objective existence of those 'beings possessing organizations similar to our own,' whose reality Tennyson—and apparently Mr. Masterman—somewhat unphilosophically take for granted? Metaphysically, my fellow men are as merely 'phenomena' as the stars in the sky or the figures on the dial, and, so viewed for the purposes of my daily life, can have no possible claim on my consideration. Unless I grant the real, objective existence of my neighbour, and his capacity to suffer as I suffer and to enjoy as I enjoy, where is my moral obligation to take him into account at all? Good metaphysics may be very questionable common sense. Laugh as we may at old Samuel Johnson smiting the table to prove the existence of matter, we must all literally accept his ruling in our daily life. 'The universe,' says Mr. Masterman, 'need no longer affright us through its greatness,' but I fear he will find few to echo the sentiment, or to discover in his proffered solution any comfort which will survive a moment's thought. *De deux choses, l'une*—the entire macrocosm, of which Time and Space are but the vastest features, and which includes Man as it includes them, is real or a dream. One cannot choose portions of such a whole and deny to them an objective reality granted to the rest.

Mr. Masterman, having exhibited the process by

which Tennyson exorcised the disquieting phantom of 'Vastness,' proceeds, in the second chapter of his book, to discuss that by which he arrived at the 'Faith' which he made it his lifelong task to inculcate in the mind of his generation. Here again it will be well to let Mr. Masterman speak for himself and his great subject.

We have reduced everything, says Mr. Masterman, to two fundamental propositions, and these appear mutually destructive. On the one hand, that the Universe is fundamentally perfect; on the other, the presence of imperfection: in theological language, the existence of God and the existence of evil. And apparently we can go no further. We can retrace our steps along each line, without finding a flaw in any link of the chain; but placing one proposition against the other, both representing facts, we can see no possibility of subordinating one to the other or of including both in some higher synthesis. If the adoption of imperfection was necessary for the attainment of greater perfection, then God was not originally perfect. If the adoption of imperfection was not necessary, then why does imperfection exist? . . . . And so at length we arrive at a blank outlook, and realise that, with our present limited, imperfect knowledge, intellectual consideration will carry us no farther.

Tennyson declines to be content with this impossible conclusion. He clearly recognises this knowledge, and the limitation of human intelligence. Yet he will not adopt the ready expedient of shutting his eyes to either set of facts. To take refuge in a a blank atheism would be to neglect the one chain of reasoning. To refuse to acknowledge the evil of the world, and assert a blind optimism, would be to neglect the other. To suspend judgment, and refuse to commit oneself to either alternative, is impossible in a world where action is imperative: every word and deed, every conscious choice of daily

life must depend implicitly, if not explicitly, on the decision which is accepted. We are compelled, by the conditions of our existence in a world of change, to act as if we had solved the problem ; and the theoretical oscillation, which might be possible in a world of thought, becomes intolerable in a world of free choice between conflicting claims.

And here, Tennyson asserts, is the true sphere for the operation of faith. Faith furnishes the impulse and predominant motive demanded for action by the bold assertion that, *in some manner unknown to us*, these contradictory propositions are reconcilable. It emphasises our refusal to shut our eyes to either facts of experience ; but it trusts that in some higher unity, the nature of which we cannot even conceive, these two contrary propositions may be harmonised. To every man, to the determined Pyrrhonist or most convinced Sceptic, some measure of faith is necessary for the transition from his metaphysic to his practical philosophy. Recognise that evil possesses real existence, and we can assail it, and battle with it, and pass our lives in conflict with it ; but for support in this combat, and for motive in the long day's struggle, we must also maintain faith in the reality of goodness, and the unity of the world, and the ultimate triumph of righteousness. *And although, intellectually, we may have no glimmerings of a possible harmony ; yet if we are faithful to our belief we may find other reasons for adhering to it. Doubts will still trouble us, but deep in the human heart there will arise a conviction which no logical argument can destroy, a confident apprehension that 'all is well.'* *

Well might Buchanan proclaim the hopeless illogicality of all who 'seek to trim and tinker the bewildering popular religion.'† We are, says Tennyson

* 'Tennyson as a Religious Teacher.' (*The italics are mine.*)

† Prose note to 'The Ballad of Mary the Mother.'

—and apparently Mr. Masterman echoes the statement—to evade the sense of personal insignificance provoked by the vastness of the Universe by declaring that *part* of the phenomena which so affright us is only phenomenal, while admitting the objective reality of the rest. And further, we are to reconcile the eternal paradox of the cruelty or indifference of Nature by taking for granted a 'possible harmony' of which, it is confessed, we have not even 'a glimmering!' I have read somewhere of one of the old quacksalvers and projectors of the Middle Ages that he made it a *sine quâ non* with all pupils who committed themselves to his tuition that, for three years, they should study no system but his, and permit no doubt of his teaching to find room in their minds. A royal road to belief indeed, but not one which is likely to commend itself to a generation fed by the thought of Spencer and Huxley. Such a philosophy is impossible of acceptance by the thinking minority who have made up their minds *to know*, even if the whole sum of knowledge they can arrive at is that they can know nothing. One turns from such a feast of husks, such 'vacant chaff well meant for grain,' to the dish-and-all-swallowing 'faith' of Bishop Blougram with a sense of positive relief:—

> I hear you recommend, I might at least
> Eliminate, decrassify my faith
> Since I adopt it, keeping what I must
> And leaving what I can—such points as this.
> I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.
> Supposing there's no truth in what I hold

About the need of trial to men's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same
To such a process I discern no end.
Clearing off one excrescence to see two,
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big
That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?
Experimentalize on sacred things!
I trust nor hand, nor eye, nor heart, nor brain,
To stop betimes; they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

Here, at least, something like an intellectual foothold is possible. We may call the man who clings to such a position a moral and intellectual 'skulker,' but all the logical cannonading in the world will not dislodge one stone of his fortress. He is neither above nor below logical argument—he is out of its range altogether. Tennyson was nearer, in his theological standpoint, to Bishop Blougram than to the leaders of scientific thought. Mr. Masterman, with a healthy scorn for the mere 'case-making' advocacy which will have the object of its adulation right on all points, owns as much:—

It was the safe rather than the heroic course that Tennyson exalted in the world of thought and of action. In his own speculation he never launched out on the turmoil of modern doubt. *He was always crushing his doubts, refusing to let them shake his belief in the older ideal.* . . . And the consequence of all this is, that for the more adventurous minds, Tennyson, as a teacher, can never give that full satisfaction which they can derive from those who have journeyed freely, and gone forward

wherever they may be led. He is too much prepared to judge success and failure by the mere worldly standard; he cannot see that 'earth's failure' may be necessary for 'heaven's success,' and that it is better to have failed in a great cause than to have contentedly acquiesced in a lower ideal. It is well to remember the lesson insisted on by a great contemporary writer, 'While in all things that we see or do we are to desire perfection, and to strife for it, we are, nevertheless, not to set the narrow thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the noble thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honourable defeat, not to lower the level of our aims that we may surely enjoy the complacency of success.'

This intellectual timidity runs all through Tennyson's work, bounding his outlook, shortening his hands, cramping the effort of which, had it been backed by an extra grain of mental courage, such a genius as his might have been capable. Let us once more listen to Mr. Masterman :—

'Trim hedges, smooth lawns, butterflies, posies, and nightingales'—a quiet English scenery—is the scenery loved by Tennyson. This is peopled by contented peasants, who bow deferentially to their superiors, a society organized in a hierarchy culminating in the great house. Here dwell a select and cultured few, who discuss mild philosophy, profess a languid enthusiasm for slowly broadening freedom, and, in moments of leisure, thank God for the existence of the narrow seas that protect them from 'the mad fool-fury of the Seine.' Such was Tennyson's ideal of the perfect life. And it was because he lived to see the gradual destruction of this order, and seemed powerless to restrain the incoming tide, that in his latter years his voice so often rose in a melancholy cry of despair. His ideal was benevolence descending, halo-crowned,

received with enthusiastic gratitude by those below. 'Why,' he asked, as if suddenly discovering some marvellous act of kindness,

> Why should not these great Sirs
> Give up their parks some dozen times a year,
> To let the people breathe?

He lived, alas! to see 'the people' claiming as their own right that which was to be granted as a gracious favour; the hedges broken down, the motley crowd flooding in on to the pleasant preserves; strange shapes, socialists, democrats, anarchists, each preaching some new creed, which was to create the new heaven and the new earth; the downfall of the older ideal; the stormful birth of the new era. Small wonder, if he turned away in disgust from—

> This earth a stage so gloomed with woe,
> You all but sicken at the shifting scenes.

Small wonder indeed that a man of such a temperament should so turn away, but something surely of a pity that the most divinely beautiful of all English singers should have found no message for the down-trodden helots of an effete hierarchy other than that conveyed in the old familiar jingle:—

> Always know your proper stations,
> Live upon your daily rations,
> And bless the Squire and his relations.

This is obviously not the place in which to attempt a complete appreciation of the work of the two great poets with whose theological tendencies I have thus briefly dealt, and I must rely upon the candour of my readers to understand that the gift of imagination and the power of expression

which were the especial glories both of Browning and Tennyson have no warmer living admirer than myself. Nor, when I claim for Buchanan—as I shall presently attempt to prove—that, in his views and treatment of theological questions, he came nearer than they to expressing the trend of his generation, do I make any claim for him of genius generally superior to theirs. He would himself have been the first to repudiate any such claim. The frank and cordial admiration he extended to both his great rivals was repeatedly expressed. He held Tennyson *facile princeps* as a verbal artist, and he laboured hard for many years among the little band of critics whose generous praise did so much to atone to Browning for journalistic insult and public neglect. In offering my appraisement of him for what it may be worth, I enjoy a complete sense of critical liberty, inasmuch as I know that, could it reach his knowledge, he would ask no more than I have to give; that he would neither desire nor accept a critical verdict which would place him one inch higher than he has a right to be at the expense of contemporaries whose splendid gifts he was himself ever the first to recognise and acclaim. That he might, had he so chosen, have stood beside the greatest merely as a poetic stylist, is my express conviction. The boy who, in the early twenties, could write verse of the quality of that Buchanan wrote in the 'Undertones' had nothing to fear, as a writer of verse, even from the impeccable Tennyson. But, in his later years, he was content to forego what,

unfortunately, he had come to consider a prize not worth the grasping. He had educated himself into a contempt of verbal *chic* or prettiness—an unwise contempt, since even mere *chic* is distinctly worth having—and had a fierce impatience of mere perfection of verbal form, not giving it the importance it fairly possesses even when its beauty is merely the fitting garniture of noble thought. 'Two-thirds of our native poetic growth from Euphues downwards is mere verbiage,' he wrote, 'and of late years verbiage has blossomed with the amazing splendour of a sunflower.' The theory which guided him throughout the latter years of his career was, as he himself expressed it, 'the theory that the end and crown of Art is simplicity, and that words, when they only conceal thought, are the veriest weeds, to be cut remorselessly away.' But it cannot be said for him that, in avoiding mere floweriness, he always succeeded in avoiding verbiage, and the careless rapidity with which he wrote but too often made his style unworthy of his matter. It was a favourite saying of his that, if the thought was clear, the vocabulary to clothe it came of itself, which, though true enough to an extent, is only a half-truth. Thought is common to all intelligent people, and most ideas may fairly be said to be common property. Solomon nor Shakespeare had no keener—perhaps no deeper—sense of the mystery of life than many a thoughtful peasant, but the peasant can only at some passing moment of high emotion find the phrase which

illumines the depth of his own heart. I remember, years ago, hearing the news broken to a working miner that the home he had left safe and happy only an hour or two before had been swallowed in a landslip determined by the sinking of the ground above the gallery of a worked-out mine. His mother, his wife, and his two children had perished. Except that the man's face went ashen grey in colour, he showed little sign of emotion, but after a minute of dumb immobility he passed his hand across his eyes like a man struggling against an overpowering dizziness, and said, 'I shall wake by-and-by.' The sentiment conveyed by the words is identical with that tremendous line of the Elizabethan poet, put into the mouth of Titus Andronicus, who, like the illiterate miner, was staggered by a catastrophe too great for instant comprehension:—

When will this fearful slumber have an end?

A poet might write any number of such verses quite coolly, moved only by the mere artistic thrill of pleasure in his creation of a strong and living line. The rude phrase of the miner was probably the one striking utterance of his life. A local poet of the same district—the South Staffordshire Black Country—ran Burns neck-and-neck so far as the sentiment of his verse was concerned, in such doggerel as the following:—

The sun that shines so bright above
Knows nought about my wrongful love:

The birds that sing in Wigmore Lane
Bring nothing to my heart but pain:
It is a very dismal thing
That in my ears the birds should sing
While my Selina has gone off
To walk with Mr. Abraham Gough.

Where is the difference, save in that all-essential quality of style, between this and Burns's anguished cry :—

Ye'll break my heart, ye little birds
That wanton on yon flowery thorn—
Ye mind me of departed joys—
Departed never to return!

The only meed we can yield the pitman-poet is a smile. The phrase of Burns, which is, verbally, almost as simple, wrings the heart-strings; yet both express an identical feeling—the sense of angry revolt at the indifference of external Nature to our personal woe.

It may be said, as a broad and easy generalisation, that the lover of mere beauty will prefer the earlier poems of Buchanan; the lover of thought, his later work. It was but seldom, after forty, that the rush and turmoil of the ideas he felt it his mission to express left him the time or the desire to linger over his work, to polish it to the highest attainable pitch of brightness. Let it be remembered that it was a lad of twenty-two who wrote the following passage from 'Pan,' in 'Undertones,' and the claim for Buchanan, that, had he been content to cultivate beauty of expression as the greatest poetical good, he might have stood shoulder to shoulder with the

greatest of English verbal artists will hardly be seriously questioned.

In Arcady

I, sick of mine own envy, hollow'd out
A valley, green and deep, then, pouring forth
From the great hollow of my hand a stream
Sweeter than honey, bade it wander on
In soft and rippling lapse to the far sea.
Upon its banks grew flowers as thick as grass,
Gum-dropping poplars and the purple vine,
Slim willows dusty like the thighs of bees,
And further, stalks of corn and wheat and flax,
And even further, on the mountain sides
White sheep and new yean'd lambs, and in the midst
Mild-featured shepherds piping. Was not this
An image of your grander ease, O gods?
A sweet, faint picture of your bliss, O gods?
They thanked me, those sweet shepherds, with the smoke
Of crimson sacrifice of lambkins slain,
Rich spices, succulent herbs that savour meats;
And when they came upon me ere aware,
Walk'd sudden on my presence where I piped
By rivers low my mournful ditties old,
Cried 'Pan!' and worshipp'd. Yet it was not well,
Ye gods, it was not well, that I, who gave
The harvest to these men, and, with my breath
Thickened the wool upon the backs of sheep,
I, Pan, should in those purblind mortal forms
Witness a loveliness more gently fair,
Nearer to your dim loveliness, O gods!
Than my immortal wood-pervading self—
Carelessly blown on by the rosy Hours,
Who breathe quick breath and smile before they die—
Goat-footed, horn'd, a monster—yet a god.

For modern music more perfect than this we must

go to Keats, to Shelley, or to the mature work of Tennyson. More than one other of the poems in the same collection has this magic of melody. Listen to the varied, changing syllabic beat of 'Selene the Moon.'

I hide myself in the cloud that flies
  From the west and drops on the hill's grey shoulder,
And I gleam through the cloud with my panther eyes,
  While the stars turn pale, the dews grow colder;
I veil my naked glory in mist,
  Quivering downward and dewily glistening,
Till his sleep is as pale as my lips unkist,
  And I tremble above him, panting and listening.
As white as a star, as cold as a stone,
  Dim as my light in a sleeping lake,
With his head on his arm he lieth alone,
  And I sigh 'Awake!
Wake, Endymion, wake and see!'
And he stirs in his sleep for the love of me;
  But on his eyelids my breath I shake:
    'Endymion, Endymion!
      Awaken, awaken!'
And the yellow grass stirs with a mystic moan,
  And the tall pines groan,
And Echo sighs in her grot forsaken
  The name of Endymion!

* * * * *

Aï! The black earth brightens, the sea creeps near,
  When I swim from the sunset's shadowy portal;
But he will not see, and he will not hear,
  Though to hear and to see were to be immortal:
Pale as a star and cold as a stone,
  Dim as my ghost in a sleeping lake,
In an icy vision he lieth alone,
  And I sigh, 'Awake!

Wake, Endymion, wake and be
  Divine, divine, for the love of me!'
And my odorous breath on his lids I shake:
  'Endymion, Endymion!
   Awaken, awaken!'
But Jove sitteth cold on his cloud-shrouded throne
  And heareth my moan,
And his stern lips form not the hope-forsaken
  Name of Endymion.

I do not wish to overload my pages with quotation, but a certain latitude in this matter is allowable, and indeed necessary; and I must ask the liberty to allow Buchanan to speak for himself in justification of certain claims I make for him in cases where his own personal utterance alone can carry conviction of the justice of the claim. His later work, dealing always honestly, and sometimes fiercely, with vital questions of conduct and outlook regarding which every thinking man must needs work out his own belief, naturally attracted an amount of notice which has tended to throw into the shade of forgetfulness the earlier achievements upon which, as an artist, his fame will ultimately rest. Critical duty would be only partially fulfilled were not the attention of the reader redirected to work of lofty artistic quality, which in the polemical excitement occasioned by such utterances as 'The Wandering Jew,' and 'Mary the Mother,' has been, if only temporarily and partially, forgotten or ignored. Finally forgotten or neglected it could not be; its artistic quality will ensure it a place in the anthology of English poetry, and there is more than a mere off-chance in the

possibility of its finally eclipsing in the popular affection the later work in which its author had the greater faith as a passport to the consideration of posterity. Beauty in a work of art must always be a paramount quality, and, when once recognised, is in small danger of ever being forgotten. I shall permit myself one final and perhaps rather lengthy quotation from the 'Undertones,' in which Buchanan touched the high-water-mark of his poetical achievement, a poem worthy of the supreme beauty and divine significance of the affections to which it owed its creation. 'Undertones' were preceded by a Prologue, addressed to 'David in Heaven,' and closed by an Epilogue dedicated to 'Mary on Earth.' 'David' was David Gray, the poet of the Luggie, the splendidly gifted and unfortunate young writer to whom Buchanan was united by the bonds of an affection which may be soberly described as passionate. His early death was, to the surviving friend, as bitter a blow as the loss of Arthur Henry Hallam was to Tennyson. And, as Hallam's death inspired one of the most exquisite poems in the literature of the entire world, so the death of David Gray moved Buchanan to utterances of sorrow which, to my ear and heart at least, are scarcely less beautiful. 'Mary' was Mary Jay, Buchanan's dearly loved wife, whose loss, some sixteen years ago, caused him a sorrow even more poignant than that which dwelt about the memory of his boyish friend. She was living at the date of the poem which bears her name, and for some years thereafter, and in that poem Buchanan brought

into sweet accord the two loftiest and most abiding influences of his life, his yearning for his dead friend, his affection for his living bride. I quote the poem in its entirety, feeling it too sacred for mutilation, and feeling also that it alone will suffice to justify the claim I make —that its author stands of right among the great poets of England.

1.

So, now the task is ended; and to-night,
Sick, impotent, no longer soul-sustain'd,
Withdrawing eyes from that ideal height
Where, in low undertones, those spirits plain'd,
Each full of special glory unattain'd—
I turn on you, Sweet-Heart, my weary sight.—
Shut out the darkness, shutting in the light:
So! now the task is ended. What is gain'd?

2.

First, sit beside me. Place your hand in mine.
From deepest fountains of your veins the while
Call up your Soul; and briefly let it shine
In those grey eyes with mildness feminine.
Yes, smile, Dear!—you are truest when you smile.

3.

My heart to-night is calm as peaceful dreams.—
Afar away the wind is shrill, the culver
Blows up and down the moor with windy gleams,
The birch unlooseneth her locks of silver
And shakes them softly on the mountain streams,
And o'er the grave that holds my David's dust
The Moon uplifts her empty, dripping horn:
Thither my fancies turn, but turn in trust,
Not wholly sadly, faithful though forlorn.

For you, too, love him, mourn his life's quick fleeting;
We think of him in common. Is it so?—
Your little hand has answer'd, and I know
His name makes music in your heart's soft beating;
And—well, 'tis something gain'd for him and me—
Him, in his heaven, and me, in this low spot,
Something his eyes will see, and joy to see—
That you, too, love him, though you knew him not.

4.

Yet this is bitter. We were boy and boy,
Hand link'd in hand we dreamt of power and fame,
We shared each other's sorrow, pride, and joy,
To one wild tune our swift blood went and came,
Eyes drank each other's hope with flash of flame.
Then, side by side, we clomb the hill of life,
We ranged thro' mist and mist, thro' storm and strife;
But then,—it is so bitter, now, to feel
That his pale Soul to mine was so akin,
Firm fix'd on goals we each set forth to win,
So twinly conscious of the sweet Ideal,
So wedded (God forgive me if I sin!)
That neither he, my friend, nor I, could steal
One glimpse of heaven's divinities—alone,
And flushing, seek his brother, and reveal
Some hope, some joy, some beauty, else unknown;
Nor, bringing down his sunlight from the Sun,
Call sudden up, to light his fellow's face,
A smile as proud, as glad, as that I trace
In your dear eyes, now, when my work is done.

5.

Love gains in giving. What had I to give
Whereof his Poet-Soul was not possest?
What gleams of stars he knew not, fugitive
As lightning-flashes, could I manifest?

What music, fainting from a clearer air?
What light of sunrise from beyond the grave?
What pride in knowledge that he could not share?—
Ay, Mary, it is bitter; for I swear
He took with him, to heav'n, no wealth I gave.

6.

No, Love, it is not bitter! Thoughts like these
Were sin the songs I sing you must adjust.
Not bitter, ah! not bitter!—God is just;
And, seeing our one-knowledge, just God chose
By one swift stroke, to part us. Far above
The measure of my hope, my pain, my love,
Above our seasons, suns and rains and snows,—
He, like an exhalation, thus arose;
Hearing in a diviner atmosphere
Music we only *see*, when, dewy and dim,
The stars through gulfs of azure darkness swim,
Music we seem to see, but cannot hear.
But evermore my Poet, on his height,
Fills up my Soul with sweetness to the brim,
Rains influence, and warning, and delight;
And *now*, I smile for pride and joy in him!

7.

I said, Love gains by giving. And to know
That I, who could not glorify my Friend,
Soul of my Soul, although I loved him so,
Have power and strength and privilege to lend
Glimpses of heav'n to Thee, of hope, of bliss!
Power to go heavenward, pluck flowers and blend
Their hues in wreaths I give thee with a kiss—
You, Love, who climb not up the heights at all!
To think, to think, I never could upcall
On his dead face, so proud a smile as this!

8.

Most just is God, who bids me not be sad
For his dear sake whose name is dear to thee,
Who bids me proudly climb and sometimes see
With joy a glimpse of him in glory clad;
Who, further, bids your life be proud and glad,
When I have climb'd and seen, for joy in me.
My lowly-minded, gentle-hearted Love!
I bring you down his gifts, and am sustain'd:
You watch and pray. I climb—he stands above.
So, now the task is ended, what is gain'd.

9.

This knowledge.—Better in your arms to rest,
Better to love you till my heart should break,
Than pause to ask if he who would be blest
Should love for more than his own loving's sake.
So closer, closer still; for (while afar,
Mile upon mile toward the Polar star,
Now in the autumn time our Poet's dust
Sucks back thro' grassy sods the flowers it thrust
To feel the summer on the outer earth)
I turn to you, and on your bosom fall.
Love gains by giving. I have given my all,
So, smile—to show you hold the gift of worth.

10.

Ay, all the thanks that I on earth can render
To him who sends me such good news from God,
Is, in due turn, to thy young life to tender
Hopes that denote, while blossoming in splendour
Where an invisible Angel's foot hath trod.
So, sweetheart, I have given unto thee,
Not only such poor song as here I twine,
But Hope, Ambition, all of mine or me,
My flesh and blood, and more, my Soul divine.

> Take all, take all! Ay, wind white arms about
> My neck and from my breath draw bliss for thine:
> Smile, Sweet-Heart, and be happy—lest thou doubt
> How much the gift I give thee makes thee mine!

It is undeniable that during the latter years of his life Buchanan failed not merely to improve in verbal technique, but even to hold anything like the high level of excellence which he had formerly attained and held so easily. There are several explanations of this merely artistic decadence. He had passed the earlier years of his life in bitter struggle in London, and, after that period of enforced poverty, had chosen to spend a further time in the wilder portions of Scotland and Ireland, living a life of the completest simplicity. Had he continued that existence his work would, in all probability, have been very much smaller in bulk, and proportionately finer in texture. But he heard the great world calling; he sickened of the loneliness of the mountain and the moor, feeling, as he himself has told us, that, 'after ten years of solitude he should have gone mad if he had not rushed back into the thick of life.' Weary of solitary dreaming, he found an almost fierce delight in 'superabundant activity.' Fame had come to him, and with fame came too a large increase in the wages of his work. Every magazine and review in London was open to him, the theatre held out golden lures. His facility of execution was something astounding—almost disquieting. I have known him produce a one-volume novel of the length of fifty thousand words in twelve days, and a three-act comedy,

which ran for over a year in London, was invented and written in less than a week. All the vast mass of thought, scholarship and experience which he had accumulated during the first tranquil twenty years of his active intellectual life was seething and fermenting in his brain; length of practice as a writer had given him enormous facility of expression; the costly life of London demanded far more money than had sufficed for the simpler existence of Skye and Connemara; and by a natural and inevitable consequence, his literary output grew in extent and—but too frequently—declined in quality. His professedly poetical work alone makes something like the bulk of Browning's, and many times the bulk of Tennyson's. Add to that the writing (and personal production) of over fifty plays; the writing of more than thirty novels and of a camel-load of critical, polemical, and sociological 'etceteras' in the forms of pamphlet, review, and 'Letters to the Editor' of the *Telegraph*, the *Chronicle*, the *Star*, the *Sunday Special*, and other metropolitan journals; and a huge mass of unpublished and unfinished work in prose and rhyme, and it will be seen that the forty years of intellectual activity allotted to Buchanan were fairly well filled; and that it is little wonder that he fell out of the running, merely as an artist, with craftsmen whose leisurely habits of production allowed them to 'smoke seven pipes' over the polishing of a single phrase. An incurable contempt of money, joined to the tenderest heart in the world, helped not a little towards this consummation. Robert

Buchanan could hear of no case of poverty or suffering and rest until he had relieved it, and for many years he was the milch-cow of every impecunious scribbler in London. His nationality must have cost him many scores of pounds per annum, because, at all times open to the moving influence of a tale of woe, he would always reward with a double gratuity any such tale that was told with a Scotch accent. The actor who had fallen on evil times dined sumptuously on the day he met Buchanan. Often laughing at himself for being the dupe of people he knew to be morally unworthy, he never knotted his purse-strings for such a reason. It was enough that the applicant was poor. He had little faith in 'organized' charity, and detested the self-advertisement of the published subscription list. He felt that charity was hardly charity at all unless the alms could pass from hand to hand, accompanied by a word of hopeful cheer which doubled the value of the gift The days of his own early struggles remained with him a living memory, and kept his heart soft for all the stepsons of Dame Fortune :—

Et ego in Bohemia fui!
Have known its fountains deep and dewy,
Have wandered where the sun shone mellow
On many an honest, ragged fellow,
And for Bohemia's sake since then
Have loved poor brothers of the pen.
I've popt at vultures circling skyward,
I've made the carrion-hawks a bye-word,
But never caused a sigh or sob in
The breast of mavis or cock-robin,

Nay, many such (let Time attest me!)
Have fed out of my hand, and blest me!
So when my wayward life is ended,
With all my sins that can't be mended,
And in my singing rags I lie
Face upward to the cruel sky,
The small birds, fluttering about me,
While birds of prey and ravens flout me,
May strew a few loose leaves above
The Outcast whom so few could love,—
And on my grave in flower-wrought words
The Inscription set that man may view it—
'He blest the nameless singing birds,
Loved the good Shepherd's flock and herds,
Et ille in Bohemia fuit!'

The position I claim for Buchanan in the Victorian period of English literature, is, then, briefly this—that his failure to attain the highest rank as an executive artist was greatly determined by the power of circumstance and in part by his own deliberate choice. I pass now to the second half of my claim, which is, that as an exponent of the deeper intellectual life of his epoch as evidenced in its religious evolution he was truer, more complete, and therefore, in so far *greater*, than his two great and friendly rivals, Browning and Tennyson, whose credentials to be accepted as the typical vocalisers of modern religious thought I have already ventured to examine. To sum up as briefly as may be their positions in this matter, I think it may fairly be said that Browning failed by ambiguity of expression, an ambiguity so marked that, to his own 'amazement

and concern,'* he found himself acclaimed as the public champion of a Church whose membership, in private, he unmistakably repudiated. Tennyson failed, as the most scholarly and one of the most admiring of his critics has found himself forced to confess, because he had not that full measure of moral and intellectual audacity firmly to face, and pitilessly to dissect, the doubts he could but feel. It now remains for us to consider the treatment accorded to identical problems by the third great English poet who, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, made it his business to deal with them.

As we have seen, in common with almost every other poet who has ever written, Buchanan began his career as a seër and delineator of beauty. The lovely myths of Greece had appealed to him as they did to Keats, and his young imagination had chosen for the site of its first wanderings the hills and forests of Hellas. Then, as will be made clear by a chronological study of his work, such themes ceased to content him, the actualities of life drew him from the contemplation of the beautiful shadows of the olden poesy; and Willie Baird and Poet Andrew, the Widow Mysie, the Little Milliner, Liz the Coster-girl, Edward Crowhurst the rustic poet, usurped the place upon the poetic easel hitherto occupied by Selene and Polyphemus, Pygmalion and Pan. The strident roll of the city street, the sweet sounds of British and Irish rustic life, entered into the

* 'The Outcast.' Epistle Dedicatory.

music of his verse, and the verse grows sadder, as it needs must do when a poet turns from the moonlit, opalescent wraiths of an extinct dreamland to the practicalities of life. The note of sadness deepens from volume to volume, though it is still relieved by such bits of innocent gaiety as 'Clari in the Well,' and of rollicking Irish devilry as 'The Wake of Tim O'Hara,' until, in the year 1870, being then in his twenty-eighth year, Buchanan struck the keynote of his future main life-work in 'Coruisken Sonnets.' It was during his wanderings amid the stern grandeurs of the Isle of Skye that the problems on whose discussion he first entered in that little volume took a firm grip of him and assumed the disquieting proportions they never afterwards lost. Small as the volume is, it is important to the student of Buchanan's theological evolution, and by no means unimportant in the poetical history of the last century. I know of nothing quite like these Sonnets, of no utterance which is, in some ways, more strange and interesting, more expressive of the spiritual unrest which is the tormenting inheritance of every thinking man born in our times. As in Browning, as in Tennyson, as in every powerful personality in any marked degree in touch with the conflicting hopes and doubts of the century, there was in Buchanan 'a dual personality;' that of the poet, the eternal child, who would so gladly be content with what he himself has called 'the fairy tales of God,' happy in the dim light and incense-laden air of the Temple of Faith, did not his adult *alter ego* clamour for satisfaction of the reason, for

iron-bound logic, for precise rectangular demonstration The second of these personalities had hitherto been asleep, stirring faintly at moments when a shadow had fallen on his closed eyelids. It was obvious that the young lad who had joined gaily in the cheap revels of the literary Bohemia, and had shared the jokes and junkets of 'inky-boys and bouncing lasses;' who had recreated his fancy by translating into song the crystalline babble of the mountain brook; had toyed with Grecian legend and depicted old Horatius Flaccus chirping over his Falernian on the Digentia; had hitherto found life too good and sweet, too satisfactorily explanatory of its own excellence, to grizzle over the problem of its ultimate outcome and meaning. But, in the weird solitudes dominated by the shadow of Mount Blaabhein the doubting half of him awoke to life:—

> Late in the gloaming of the year
> I haunt the melancholy mere;
> A Phantom I, where Phantoms brood
> In this soul-searching solitude.
> Hiding my forehead in the dim
> Hem of His robe, I question Him.

It is worthy of notice that this 'questioning' of God was not, as in the case of Tennyson, the result of a sudden shock to any individual human affection. The loss of David Gray had wounded Buchanan's heart much as the loss of Arthur Hallam had lacerated Tennyson's, but so far from having suggested to him doubt of the goodness, or of the very existence, of the Divine Fatherhood, it had actually strengthened belief

and acquiescence. It was God's 'justice,' not his cruelty, which had inspired the stroke that parted the two friends. The dead friend lived still in the 'influence and warning and delight' he rained upon the living, and, in his loneliness the survivor could still 'smile with joy and pride' in the friend who was as a veritable ambassador of his love to the throne of God. It was before the impassivity of external nature, the eternal silence of the hills, the inarticulate moan of the tormented waters, beneath the chill immensity and aloofness of the inaccessible sky, that he felt suddenly

> Cold are all these as snow, and still as stone.

Not in the anguish of sudden personal loss, but in the contrast between the stony calm of the huge cosmos reflected in a waste solitude, the question rose 'Does God exist at all?' For—

> I found Thee not by the starved widow's bed,
> Nor in the sick rooms where my dear ones died;
> In cities vast I hearken'd for Thy tread,
> And heard a thousand call Thee, wretched-eyed,
> Worn out, and bitter. But the Heavens denied
> Their melancholy Maker. From the dead
> Assurance came, nor answer! Then I fled
> Into these wastes, and raised my hands, and cried:
> 'The seasons pass—the sky is as a pall—
> Thin wasted hands on withering hearts we press—
> There is no God, in vain we plead and call,
> In vain with weary eyes we search and guess—
> Like children in an empty house sit all,
> Cast-away children, lorn and fatherless.'

There the question is posed and answered by a bitter

negative. This particular sonnet is peculiarly interesting for the double reason that while it is almost the first utterance of Buchanan's dealing with the problem of Godhead, it is also the last and only one I have been able to find in his work in which the existence of a Diety is flatly denied by the poet in his own person. An 'Atheist' in the true meaning of the word, Buchanan never was, and that he should have written this sonnet, even in his blackest mood so early in his career, is all but incredible. He knew many fluctuations of feeling and belief regarding the being of a personal God, and expressed most of them; and it is just because of that, because he found the courage not merely to face and dwell upon the problem—a courage common enough—and also because he possessed the rarer courage to feel no shame in professing and proclaiming every phase of his incertitude, that he seems to me so pre-eminently the poet of his day. He was profoundly in sympathy with the dictum of Goethe that 'Religion stands in the same relation to Art as any other of the higher interests of life.' Accepting that dictum, he asked, 'Where is the great poem, where the noble music built on that wondrous theme? . . . . The reticence of false culture steals over the life of many who might instruct us deeply by their experience. . . . There is a great emotional and spiritual life yet unrepresented, there are rude forces not yet brought into play, but all of which must sooner or later have their place in art.' He practised himself the spiritual and intellectual freedom

whose necessity he proclaimed, he marked every halting-place on the line of his own theological evolution by a volume or a song: he travelled far and wide, but never at any later period of his life did he arrive at the goal of Atheism, which yet, upon the testimony of this one sonnet, might be taken for his starting point. 'Without the sanction of the Supernatural, the certainty of the Superhuman, Life to me is nothing,' he wrote in the Epistle Dedicatory to 'The Outcast,' and I remember him saying one day that 'God and his own soul' were the only entities in the universe of which he felt any abiding certainty. But, to a mind with any strong tinge of what may perhaps be called 'intellectual practicality,' the 'God' of Buchanan seems at best but a misty, uncertain, and rather useless personality. He is certainly not the God over whose dethronement the poet mourned in the opening passages of 'The Outcast,' or defined, if 'definition' is not too precise a name for so shadowy a performance, in the Proem to 'The Book of Orm,' in lines of singular beauty:—

> When in these songs I name the Name of God,
> I mean not Him who ruled with brazen rod
> The rulers of the Jew; nor Him who calm
> Sat reigning on Olympus; nay, nor Brahm,
> Osiris, Allah, Odin, Balder, Thor,
> (Though these I honour with a hundred more);
> Menu I mean not, nor the Man Divine,
> The Pallid Rainbow lighting Palestine;
> Nor any lesser of the gods which Man
> Hath conjured out of Night since Time began.

I mean the primal Mystery and Light,
The most Unfathomable, Infinite,
The Higher Law, Impersonal, Supreme,
The Life in Life, the Dream within the Dream,
The Fountain which in silent melody
Feeds the dumb waters of Eternity,
The source whence every god hath flown and flows,
And whither each departs to find repose.

Nebulous enough! but nebulosity is the natural and inevitable result of any endeavour to define the indefinable. There was, to a positive mind, little enough to cling to even in such a Deity as this, but faint and far away as are the personality and the *locale* here described, both grew fainter yet in the poet's later years. In his last published volume, 'The New Rome,' he declares God to be 'in process of becoming,' and a rather slow and laborious process it would appear to be :—

Turn from that mirage of a God on high
Holding the sceptre of a creed outworn,
And hearken to the faint half-human cry
Of Nature quickening with the God unborn!

The God unborn, the God that is to be,
The God that has not been since Time began,—
Hark,—that low sound of Nature's agony
Echoed thro' life and the hard heart of Man!

Fed with the blood and tears of living things,
Nourished and strengthened by Creation's woes,
The God unborn, that shall be King of Kings,
Sown in the darkness, thro' the darkness grows.

Alas, the long slow travail and the pain
Of her who bears Him in her mighty womb!

How long ere He shall live and breathe and reign,
While yonder Phantom fades to give Him room?

Where'er great pity is and piteousness,
Where'er great Love and Love's strange sorrow stay,
Where'er men cease to curse, but bend to bless
Frail brethren fashioned like themselves of clay;

Where'er the lamb and lion side by side
Lie down in peace, where'er on land or sea
Infinite Love and Mercy heavenly eyed
Emerge, there stirs the God that is to be!

His light is round the slaughtered bird and beast
As round the forehead of Man crucified,—
All things that live, the greatest and the least,
Await the coming of this Lord and Guide;

And every gentle deed by mortals done,
Yea, every holy thought and loving breath,
Lighten poor Nature's travail with this Son
Who shall be Lord and God of Life and Death!

No God behind us in the empty Vast,
No God enthroned on yonder heights above,
But God emerging, and evolved at last
Out of the inmost heart of human Love!

One can only say, in this connexion, that theological terminology is at its best so misty and uncertain, that the attempt to pin any believer in any form of Godhead down to a scientific definition of the object of veneration, is to ask the impossible: and for the believer to make the attempt unasked is to attempt the impossible. Browning, wiser in his generation, was content to aver that he was 'very sure of God,' but he nowhere, in his proper person, gave any definition or description of the

God of Whom he was so certain. God, as already said, has seemed hitherto an absolute necessity to the poetic intelligence. It is a word, more infinitely full of vague suggestion than 'Mesopotamia,' and the poet finds a mysterious comfort in repeating it, and in clinging to some shadowy and nameless outside force for which it serves as a sort of algebraic symbol. It was the Celtic strain in Buchanan's blood which made him cling to this diaphanous spectre of Deity, though there were moments when the Divine Donothingness moved his passionately human heart to outcries of revolt, as in that bitter parody, 'The Devil's Prayer,' printed originally in the sixth section of 'The Book of Orm':—

Father, which art in Heaven,—not here below;
Be Thy name hallowed, in that place of worth;
And till Thy Kingdom cometh, and we know,
Be Thy will done more tenderly on Earth;
Give us this day our bread—since we must live;
Forgive our stumblings, since Thou mad'st us blind;
If we offend Thee, Sire, at least forgive
As tenderly as we forgive our kind;—
Spare us temptation—human and divine;
Deliver us from evil, now and then;
The Kingdom, Power, and Glory all *are* Thine
For ever and for evermore. Amen.

The first of the 'Antiphones,' which follow and complete the 'Ballad of Mary the Mother,' opens with the tremendous adjuration:—

How can I love Thee, God that madest me?
Who saith he loves Thee, lies!

a statement which the poet absolutely explained and justified :—

Thy works, thy wonders, thine Omnipotence?
Shall these awake my love?
Nay, these are only phantoms of the sense
Whereby I live and move.

* * * * *

I love my fellow men, I love this hound
Who gently licks my hand,
I love the land around me, and the sound
Of children in the land.

But Thee—I love not *Thee!*—Stoop down, come near
To me whom Thou hast made,
That I may know Thee close, and hold Thee dear,—
But now I shrink afraid.

There's never a helpless thing surrounding me,
No timid bird or beast,
I love not better far, oh God, than Thee,
Tho' Thou be first, these least.

I love the maid I woo, the mother whose touch
I feel upon my brow,
The friend who grips my hand!—for these are such
As I, and not as Thou.

Thou Vision of my Thought! Thou Mystery
Of which men preach and rave!
I would not look, if Heaven held only *Thee*,
One foot beyond the grave!

I seek the gentle ones who once were near,
Not Thee, O light above,—
I crave for all who learn'd to love me here
And whom I learn'd to love!

More than one professedly religious journal de-

nounced this utterance as 'blasphemous.' Yet, after all, what is it but another facet of the truth proclaimed by Tennyson :—

> Merit lives from man to man,
> And not, O God, from man to Thee—

a statement placidly accepted by all and sundry. The fundamental idea is here the same as that expressed in the dedication of 'The Wandering Jew' to Buchanan's dead father, 'Robert Buchanan, Poet and Social Missionary' :—

> Father on Earth, for whom I wept bereaven,
> Father more dear than any Father in Heaven—

and in it is clearly readable, to any sympathetic and intelligent student of Buchanan's work, the spirit which informed alike his work and his life.

Buchanan's early years had been absolutely godless, in the sense that no form of revealed religion had ever been brought to his notice during his childhood. He was, as he has told us, 'born in Robert Owen's New Moral World,' and had 'scarcely heard even the name of God until at ten years of age' he went to Scotland. He became, he goes on to say, 'God-intoxicated from the first moment he beheld the mountains and the sea'—from the moment, that is to say, at which he found his first revelation of the physical glories of the world. From that moment until twelve years later—the time of his wanderings in the Isle of Skye, which prompted the writing of the 'Coruisken Sonnets'—he probably, so to speak, took God for

granted, happy in an unexamined sense of the perpetual presence of a wonderful and worshipful Maker of a wonderful and delightful world. The Deity was a *trouvaille*, a wonderful 'find' he had made for himself, and he was as contented in its possession as a child who, having found a broken decanter-stopper, believes himself the possessor of a Koh-i-noor. Then, in early manhood, came the question, the chill of doubt, the momentary blank negation, and afterwards the return to a faith in *some* sort of Deity—undefinable, since, as we have seen, he himself failed to define it. But the doubt grew, and the faith diminished, because the facts of life, strive as he would to keep before his eyes the rose-tinted glasses of poetic and religious optimism, grew in stern clearness of outline, and spoke unquestionable truths which would be neither gainsaid nor ignored. Sorrow and sin and sickness and death; unmerited suffering, war and prostitution and hunger; the brutal follies of men in high places; the daily failures and stumblings of all men, hurtful to themselves and to those about them; abortive effort and its grim set-off, undeserved success—these, and all the other thousand ills of flesh, must needs be looked at and their existence recognised. And side by side with such personal experiences was working the eager love for every kind of knowledge which could be found in the recorded experience of other men. Though, when they assailed too closely that nebulous Deity to which to the last he persisted in clinging, Buchanan would sometimes petulantly repel the leaders of modern

science, and denounce the light they brought as a mere Jack o'Lantern, he could not repulse it, and for the last thirty years of his life he was an eager student of modern scientific literature. He could say, with his own Vanderdecken,

All this season
During my residence among you,
I've searched the poor, stale scraps of reason
Your last philosophers have flung you.
I've read through Comte, the Catechism,
(Half common sense, half crank and schism),
And Harriet Martineau's synopsis;
Puzzled through Littré's monstr' informous
Encyclopædia enormous,
Until my brain grew blank as Topsy's.
I've sucked the bloodless books of Mill,
As void of gall as any pigeon;
I've swallowed Congreve's patent pill
To purge man's liver of Religion;
I've tried my leisure to amuse
With Freddy Harrison's reviews;
I've thumbed the essays of John Morley,
So positive they made me poorly:—

* * *

The *Leben Jesu*, Renan's *Vie*,
I also studied thoroughly;
I vivisected cats with Lewes,
I tortured gentle dogs with Ferrier,
Found out just what grimalkin's mew is,
And how tails wag in pug and terrier;
But came, however close I sought,
No nearer to the riddle of Thought.

* * *

Then finally, in sheer despair,
Burn'd deep with Scepticism's caustic

> Found Spencer staring at the air,
> Crying, 'God knows if God is there!'
> And, in a trice, become agnostic!

So catholic a study of modern thought could have but one result upon a normal intelligence.

> Cosmogony,
> Geology, ethnology, what not—

which Bishop Blougram speaks of as

> Greek endings, each the little passing bell
> That signifies some faith's about to die—

are rather to be compared to mordant acids, fatally certain to eat out the heart of the robustest faith; though some hollow simulacrum, like Buchanan's 'God' may still be left erect in some dark corner of the mind. Frequently, in his earlier work, Buchanan consoled himself, as did Tennyson, by the dream of a God who was not indifferent, but merely working out with infinite pity and infinite patience an all-embracing scheme of salvation, in which wretchedness and wrong were only temporary expedients, to be justified presently to the sufferers by the granting of a fuller knowledge. One may be glad that he passed through such a phase of thought, for out of that phase came much noble and beautiful work, as, for instance, 'The Vision of the Man Accurst' in 'The Book of Orm.' In this Vision, the poet beholds the world after the Day of Judgement, a solitude but for one Man

> Who had sinned all sins, whose soul
> Was blackness and foul odour,

and whose dread fate it is to wander among the deserts of earth in a solitude and silence broken only by his own blasphemies. Summoned after a period to the presence of God, he is still fiercely unrepentant, and defies God by the mouth of God's ambassador :—

> He saith his Soul is filled
> With hate of Thee and of Thy ways ; he loathes
> Pure pathways where the fruitage of the stars
> Hangeth resplendent, and he spitteth hate
> On all Thy children . . . .

God asks, 'What doth he crave?'

> Neither Thy Heaven, nor Thy holy ways.
> He murmureth out he is content to dwell
> In the Cold Clime for ever, so Thou sendest
> A face to look upon, a heart that beats,
> A hand to touch—albeit like himself,
> Black, venomous, unblest, exiled, and base ;
> Give him this thing, he will be very still,
> Nor trouble Thee again.

But there is not 'in all the waste of worlds,' another like the Man Accurst, 'the basest mortal born,' but God says—

> Yet 'tis not meet
> His cruel cry, for ever piteous
> Should trouble my eternal Sabbath day.
> Is there a spirit here, a human thing,
> Will pass this day from the Gate Beautiful
> To share the exile of the Man Accurst—
> That he may cease the shrill pain of his cry,
> And I have peace?

Two shapes answer to this appeal, and, at the

Divine command, reveal themselves as the mother and the wife of the doomed wretch. Both plead to be allowed to share his exile, though he had slain the one, and made the life on earth of the other a long and cruel torment. And

> The man wept.
>
> And in a voice of most exceeding peace
> The Lord said (while against the Breast Divine
> The Waters of Life leapt, gleaming, gladdening):
> 'The man is saved: let the man enter in!'

The idea here is, as will at once be seen, identical with that which informs the 'Ballad of Judas Iscariot,' the most popular and widely known—one is glad to know, for the credit of the popular judgment—of all Buchanan's briefer pieces. It is the note of all that is finest and best in Buchanan's achievement. In these two poems, the Tennysonian faith

> That not one life shall be destroyed
> Or cast as rubbish to the void
> When God hath made the pile complete—

is very beautifully exemplified. But the study of life and of the lessons of modern science were disintegrating any such hope, and so, in Buchanan's deeper work, viewed as a whole, there is to be beheld a curious spectacle—the spectacle of a man who, clinging with despairing grip to a shibboleth, yet frequently belabours the figure whose label is the very shibboleth itself. The calm indifference of a *fainéant* Deity, sitting aloof in 'impotence of Godhead,' stirred the poet to warn

and lecture the Celestial Majesty in a fashion which the orthodox believer was quite justified in thinking disrespectful. In this same 'Book of Orm,' the poet addresses the Deity in the following terms—

Master, if there be Doom,
All men are bereaven!
If, in the universe
One Spirit receive the curse,
Alas for Heaven!
If there be Doom for one,
Thou, Master, art undone.

* * *

Art thou less piteous than
The conception of a man?

In 'The City of Dream' a cognate idea is set forth with logical sobriety:—

That duty the created owes
To the Creator, the Creator, too,
Owes the Created. God hath given me life;
I thank my God if life a blessing is;
How may I bless Him if it proves a curse?

In the already quoted 'Devil's Prayer' and in a passage of 'Carmen Deific' ('The New Rome'), the statement is stronger:—

If I were a God like you, and you were a man like me,
And in the dark you prayed and wept and I could hear and see,
The sorrow of your broken heart would darken all my day,
And never peace or pride were mine till it was smiled away,—
I'd clear my Heaven above your head till all was bright and blue,
If you were a man like me, and I were a God like you.

Here, we are far indeed from the God Who pardoned Judas Iscariot and the Man Accurst; far away from the 'solace and certainty' which, in another time and mood, the poet had found on 'the shore of the celestial ocean.'*

It is, of course, obvious that since God includes Christ, and since an always impersonal and finally utterly nebulous Deity could hardly be conceived as begetting carnal offspring, the unescapable corollary of the theological evolution I have attempted to trace was the categorical denial of the Divine parentage of Jesus. I doubt if, at any period of his life, Buchanan was ever a Christian in the dogmatic sense—the only sense in which, it will be remembered, he permitted the use of the word. I doubt if ever he was a Christian, as Byron phrased it, 'on consideration,' though the personal character and ethical teaching of Christ were the objects of his constant admiration—if, indeed, 'worship' would not be a better word. His 'Balder,' a character on whom he lavished every divine quality, every beauty of benignity and tenderness, is obviously meant as a study of the character of Christ; and in the poem as a whole there is more than a mere germ, there is a distinct foreshadowing, of the gigantic conception which informs his greatest work, 'The Wandering Jew.' The two poems should be read in succession, and, so read, a striking resemblance between their themes becomes at once apparent. Both protagonists are of divine birth, both are informed wholly with a passion of pitying tenderness

* See the last book of 'The City of Dream.'

for all living things. Balder is the object of his Father's fear and hatred; Christ, in the latter poem, is not hated by his Divine parent—he is simply the sufferer by His cynical carelessness and indifference.

'The Wandering Jew' was published in 1893. I was privileged to hear it read by its author from stage to stage of its production, and, while greatly struck and excited by its splendid qualities of idea and treatment, I prophesied for it a critical scarification compared with which any former onslaught on the author's work would be fulsome eulogy. To be just to the English Press, my prediction was almost completely falsified. One or two journals did indeed assail the book with unmeasured abuse, a midland daily of large circulation and influence describing it as 'a weltering mass of foul accusations,' and 'the morbid dream of an egotistic rhymer.' Miss Marie Corelli, with that genius for self-advertisement which distinguishes her, rushed into print with a denunciation of the book and its author. 'There would be,' said Miss Corelli, 'something inexpressibly funny in a Robert Buchanan pronouncing doom on Christ, if it were not so revolting,—a critical impertinence easily to be corrected by substituting for the name 'Robert Buchanan' the name 'Marie Corelli,' and for 'Christ,' 'Robert Buchanan.'* But the general voice of the Press was to a quite different effect, and, though many critics failed altogether to perceive the true purport or meaning of the poem, the notices as a whole were candid and generous.

* See article on 'The Master Christian.'

Even more surprising to relate, the Pulpit took up and advertised the book by the mouths of several of its most distinguished orators. 'Let me say,' said the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, 'that it will do all orthodox and devout Christians immense and endless good to read, ponder, and remember the attack upon historic and ecclesiastical Christianity which this poem utters. I say that nothing better could be done than that Robert Buchanan should rub these facts well into our ecclesiastical skins. I freely admit that through all the centuries the name of Christ has been identified with every kind of devilry. . . . There is nothing in this terrible poem to give intelligent Christians fear.' In that last phrase Mr. Hughes was no doubt doing his best to make the best of a bad case, but his frank recognition of much that is true in the book, coming from such a source, was exceedingly grateful. Dr. Joseph Parker said that 'Mr. Buchanan was on his way to the eternal altar'—a true and pregnant phrase, though hardly, I think, in the fashion its author hoped.

The story of 'The Wandering Jew' is indeed as tremendous a conception as has ever entered the mind of man, and its conduct reveals Buchanan at his best. The Poet is wandering, desolate and heart-sick, through the snowy streets of London on the night of Christmas Eve, when he hears 'a tremulous voice cry out in pain,'

> 'For God's sake, mortal, let me lean on thee!'
> And peering through the dimness I could see
> Snows of white hair blown feebly in the wind;

And deeply was I troubled in my mind
To see so ancient and so weak a wight
At the cold mercy of the storm that night,
And said, while 'neath his wintry load he bent,
'Lean on me, father!' adding, as he leant
Feebly upon me, wearied out with woe,
'Whence dost thou come? and whither dost thou go?'

O then, meseemed, the womb of Heaven afar
Quickened to sudden life, and moon and star
Flashed like the opening of a million eyes,
Dimming from every labyrinth of the skies
Their lustre on that Lonely Man; and he
Loom'd like a comer from a far countrie
In ragged antique raiment, and around
His waist a rotting rope was loosely bound,
And in one feeble hand a lanthorn quaint
Hung lax and trembling, and the light was faint
Within it unto dying, tho' it threw
Upon the snow beneath him light enew
To show his feeble feet were bloody and bare!

The Poet's first clear idea of the old wayfarer's identity is that he is Ahasuerus, the 'Wandering Jew' of legend, but, seeing upon his frozen hands the stigmata of the Great Sacrifice, he recognises Christ.

At last I knew
The lineaments of that diviner Jew
Who like a Phantom passeth everywhere,
The world's last hope and bitterest despair,
Deathless, yet dead.

Anon, the Poet finds himself

upon an open Plain
Before the City, and before my face
Rose, with mad surges thundering at its base,

A mountain like Golgotha; and the waves
That surgëd round its sunless cliffs and caves
Were human—countless swarms of Quick and Dead!

Here, a figure sits in Judgement:—

Human he seemed, and yet his eyeballs shone
From fleshless sockets of a skeleton.

A shadowy advocate rises from amid the mass, and opens his speech for the prosecution with the adjuration:—

O Judge, Death reigned since Time began,
Sov'ran of Life and Change! and ere this Man
Came with his lying dreams to break our rest
The reign of Death was beautiful and blest!
But now within the flesh of man there grows
The poison of a dream that slays repose,
The trouble of a mirage in the air
That turneth into terror and despair;
So that the Master of the World, ev'n Death,
Hated in his own Kingdom, travaileth
In darkness, creeping hunted and afraid,
Like any mortal thing, from shade to shade,
From tomb to tomb; and ever where he flies
The souls of men shrink with averted eyes,
And call with mad yet unavailing woe
On this Man and his God to lay Death low.
Wherefore the Master of the Quick and Dead
Demandeth Doom and justice on the head
Of him, this Jew, who hath usurped the throne
The Lord of flesh claims ever for his own.
This Jew hath made the Earth that once was glad
A lazar-house of woeful men and mad
Who can yet will not sleep, and in their strife
For barren glory and eternal Life
Have rent each other, murmuring his Name!

In a passage of some hundreds of lines, packed close with splendid imagery and eloquence, the Advocate extends and presses this accusation, the clanging periods of his oratory closing with the tremendous line —

> I demand doom and justice on this Jew !

Then appear the witnesses for the Prosecution—Judas, Ahasuerus, Pilate, Nero, Julian, Hypatia, some solitary, others attended by vast cohorts of dumb followers. Then comes Mahomet, escorted by the innumerable millions who have hailed him as the Prophet, and Buddha

> Star-eyed and sad and very beautiful . . . .
> He spake, the throngs who follow'd bent like grass
> Wind-blown to worship him !

Zoroaster, 'crownëd like a king,' Menu and Moses, Confucius and

> Prometheus, dragging yet his broken chain
> And gazing heavenward still, in beautiful disdain.

They pass in interminable procession,

> Each kingly in his place, and in his train
> Souls of fair worshippers that Jew had slain.

The souls of mitred Popes and priests, of Galileo and of the innumerable nameless martyrs of science ; Justinian,

> The Master of the Templars, du Molay,
> Clasped by the harlot, Fire,

Abelard and Eloise, Frederick,

> Pale Petrarch, laurel-crownèd, gazing on
> The white face of that sister wobegone
> Who through the lust of Christ's own Vicar fell—

Huss and Columbus and de Gama and Magellan ; and from West and East, vast swarms of the victims slain in the name of Christ ; Montezuma and the last of the Incas. Then comes Voltaire, with Calas blessing and embracing him ; and after him Holbach, Diderot, and the rest,

> The foes of Godhead and the friends of Man,

and finally, the innumerable hosts of Israel,

> The children of the Ghetto, gathering there,
> His brethren, fed their eyes on his despair,
> And spat their hate upon him.

It would be impossible, without transcending all precedent in the way of free quotation, to give the faintest idea of the oceanic effect of this series of pictures, which, alone among painters, Gustave Doré might have realised in form and colour. Challenged to produce his Witnesses, Jesus replies

> 'Hosts of the happy Dead whom I have blest!'
>
> 'Call! Let them come!'
>
> 'I would not break their rest!'
>
> 'Thou hast lied to them, O Jew!' the dark Judge cried.
>
> And Jesus said, 'O Judge, I have not lied!'
>
> 'False was thy promise—false and mad and drear—
> There is no Father!'
>
> 'Father, dost Thou hear?'

For the last of many times, Jesus looks heavenwards for some sign. None comes, and the Judge resumes:—

> 'Enough. Renew thy miracles, and prove
> Thy words, O Jew! From yonder void above
> Summon the Form, the Face, in all men's eyes
> And we absolve thee!'
>
> On the starry skies,
> Still thinly shrouded with the falling snow,
> He fixed his wistful gaze, and answered low,
> 'I bide my Father's time.'

John the Precursor, and 'that other John'

> Whom Jesus to his breast
> Drew tenderly, because he loved him best,

Mary the mother and her gentle namesake the Magdalen, appear and testify, and at the summons of Paul,

> Shapes of dead Saints arose, a shining throng,

But the greater throng of the victims of his false priests clamour them down and shriek for judgment. And Judgment is spoken, in words no man who has ever once perused can forget, at least in spirit and in essence.

> Since thou hast quickened that thou canst not kill,
> Awakened famine thou canst never still,
> Spoken in madness, prophesied in vain,
> And promised what no thing of clay shall gain,
> Thou shalt abide while all things ebb and flow,
> Wake while the weary sleep, wait while they go,
> And, treading paths no human feet have trod,
> Search on still vainly for thy Father, God;
> Thy blessing shall pursue thee as a curse
> To hunt thee, homeless, through the Universe;

No hand shall slay thee, for no hand shall dare
To strike the Godhead Death itself must spare!
With all the woes of Earth upon thy head,
Uplift thy Cross, and go! Thy Doom is said.

And lo! while all men come and pass away,
That Phantom of the Christ, forlorn and grey,
Haunteth the Earth with desolate footfall . . . .

God help the Christ, that Christ may help us all!

The commonest critical error made in envisaging this poem was in describing it as a direct and frontal attack upon Jesus. That to a certain extent of course it is, but it is also a flank assault. The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes set his finger on its central significance in admitting 'that through all the centuries the name of Christ has been identified with every kind of devilry.' The failure of Christ has been a failure to leave a Christ-like human progeny, to make the seed of his divinely beautiful spirit flourish in the rocky and thorny soil of human nature. The poem is at least as much a denunciation of the stupidity and cruelty of man as of the splendid and heroic folly of the greatest of the Paracletes, for whose nature and teaching it breathes nothing but love and admiration. 'I distinguish absolutely,' writes its author, 'between the character of Jesus and the character of Christianity —in other words between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus the Christ. Shorn of all supernatural pretensions, Jesus emerges from the gross mass of human beings as an almost perfect type of simplicity, veracity, and natural

affection.' 'According to my critics it is secularism, and not Christianity, which is played out "intellectually." If they mean by "secularism" the base and irreverent spirit which gibes and mocks at the beautiful dream of Jesus, and in so doing defames the stainless elder brother of all suffering men, I am cordially at one with them; but if they mean by secularism the spirit which rejects all compromises and frauds, however innocent, which affirms that the business of humanity is not to wear sackcloth and ashes, but to enlarge the area of its own happiness, and which incidentally, by way of illustration, points out the evils that other-worldliness has brought on man, I take leave to say, that at no time in the world's history has secularism exercised so benign an influence over the lives of all who think and feel. . . . . *It is only in so far as Christianity is itself secular that it is of the slightest influence upon the age in which we live.* . . . . It is because the nebulæ of [Christ's] love never cohered to an orb of rational piety, because mere sentiment can never save man till it changes into a science of life; because if this world is not something joyful and beautiful, all other worlds are dismal delusions, that Christ's message to humanity has been spoken in vain. Human love and self-respect, human science and verification, human perception of the limitation of knowledge, have done more in half a century *to justify God and prove the Godliness of life*, than the doctrines of other-worldliness have done in nineteen hundred years.' Mark, in the second of the phrases here underlined, the curious obsession already alluded

to, the clinging to the shibboleth of a name which had ceased to denote any fixed or definable idea. Eliminate that, and the rest of the utterance might, in spirit and essence, have proceeded from the pen of Thomas Huxley.

As an allegory, 'The Wandering Jew' is assuredly abundantly justified. For the last fifty years Christ has indeed been standing at the bar of human judgment, and his claim to divine birth—which in this poem Buchanan, for purely artistic purposes, tacitly admits—has been ruthlessly demolished, but not more ruthlessly than his ethico-social influence. 'The religion of Jesus has never really triumphed at all, except in the area of priestly politics and popular superstition. Our time has been wasted, we have been made the sport of a kindly thaumaturgist, for nearly nineteen hundred years.' *

And the verdict of Humanity has veritably been the verdict that Buchanan has recorded. The wan and way-worn figure of the Christ—'Deathless, yet dead'—haunts the sad world, no living presence, but the shadowy wraith of a beautiful dream and a great lost purpose, feebly wandering towards final dissolution and oblivion.

And it is because Robert Buchanan bravely recognised and fearlessly proclaimed the vanity of dreams to which his contemporaries clung, that I believe that posterity will accord to him a lofty pedestal in our national Pantheon, as the first great poet to make the

* Prose Note to 'The Ballad of Mary the Mother.'

choice of his own Balder, to turn his back upon the discredited hierarchy of Heaven and to stay on earth with Man. He obeyed the logic of his nature, he dared to 'follow his brains,' to accept the counsel of his own Dæmon, the great Æon,

> Fear not, love not, and revere not,
> What transcends your understanding,
> Keep your reverence and affection
> For the brethren whom you know.*

With unwilling and sometimes retrograde steps, he arrived ultimately where we now find him, discarding by the way many pleasant dreams, many happy fictions, his heart and brain in incessant conflict, the first clamouring at all costs to believe, the latter sternly insisting on the sacredness of Truth.

> The creeds I've cast away
> Like husks of garnered grain.

As Mirabeau with political, so he with theological formulas—*il les avait humés tous*. From a brief period of God-intoxication, through many doubts and battles and fluctuations, he came at last to face the facts of Life and Death, with only the thinnest veil of mysticism to hide their stern nakedness. Thin as that veil was, it was growing ever thinner. From the broken arc we may divine the perfect round, and it is my fixed belief that, had the subtle and cruel malady which struck him down but spared him for a little longer

* 'The Devil's Case.'

time, he would logically have completed the evolution of so many years, and have definitely proclaimed himself as an Agnostic, perhaps even as an Atheist. Tennyson, who 'crushed' his doubts

> like a vice of blood
> Upon the threshold of the mind,

might cling to the outworn superstition expressed in the lines of the second 'Locksley Hall'—

> Truth for truth, and good for good! The Good, the True, the Pure, the Just—
> Take the charm 'For ever' from them, and they crumble into dust—

but with a man of Buchanan's robuster temperament, to whom Doubt was a troublesome, but still a welcome, guest, such a belief, absolutely incompatible with historical fact and daily experience, could not long abide. Even Ruskin, hide-bound religionist as he was, could rise to a loftier conception of human nature than to think that it must needs tumble into nothingness the moment it let go of the apron-string of some grandmotherly Deity.

A brave belief in death has been assuredly held by many not ignoble persons; and it is a sign of the last depravity in the Church itself, when it assumes that such a belief is inconsistent with either purity of character or energy of hand. The shortness of life is not, to any rational person, a conclusive reason for wasting the space of it which may be granted him; nor does the anticipation of death, to-morrow, suggest, to any one but a drunkard, the expediency of drunkenness to-day. To teach that there is no device in the grave, may indeed make the deviceless person more contented in his dullness: but

it will make the deviser only more earnest in devising: nor is human conduct likely, in every case, to be purer, under the conviction that all its evil may in a moment be pardoned, and all its wrong-doing in a moment redeemed; and that the sigh of repentance, which purges the guilt of the past, will waft the soul into a felicity which forgets its pain—than it may be under the sterner, and to many not unwise minds, more probable, apprehension, that 'what a man soweth that shall he also reap'—or others reap—when he, the living seed of pestilence, walketh no more in darkness, but lies down therein.*

Entire races, to whom it never occurred to look 'one foot beyond the grave,' have produced societies as excellent, and individual natures as noble and unselfish, as have ever been suckled on the feeding-bottles of revealed religion, and the more than inexpediency of proclaiming Atheism in Christian countries has naturally resulted in placing the declared Atheist perforce among the worthiest individuals of his generation. Militant Atheism is, of course, as absurd a blunder as militant Theism. The plain fact of the matter is that we do not know, and, by the very constitution of the human intelligence, never can know, the nature of the forces which environ us; and it is as foolish to regard them as malevolent as to proclaim their benignity. They are neither malignant nor benign, they are simply indifferent.

> The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
> It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
> It has no purpose, heart, or mind, or will.†

* 'The Crown of Wild Olive' (Introduction).

† James Thomson, 'The City of Dreadful Night.'

Science and philosophy, speaking by the pen of their best-furnished exponent in this generation* have divided the entire Cosmos into two perfectly clean halves, the 'Knowable' and the 'Unknowable,' and the cultured common-sense of the world has accepted this ruling. If it had but been earlier done—if all the priceless enthusiasm, all the energy, all the effort and time and money which have been wasted on the propaganda of revealed religion had been concentrated on the elucidation of the laws of nature, the culture of the intellect, and the relief and prevention of human suffering, in what a different world we should all be dwelling now! We, of this generation, may at least be glad that we live in the dim dawn of another and a better day, a day in which men of intellect will frankly recognise the necessary limits of their own intelligence, and be content to work 'while their brief light endures' towards tangible ends and assured results, leaving the Eternal Mysteries where they must needs remain, in the realm of mystery. Humanity has too long wasted its time and effort in prostrations as barren of result as the exercises of St. Simeon on his pillar :

> I, 'tween the spring and downfall of the light,
> Bow down one thousand and two hundred times,
> To Christ, the Virgin Mother, and the Saints.

If mankind is ever to arrive at happiness it will not be by the worship of any Fetish, concrete or invisible,

* Mr. Herbert Spencer, 'First Principles.'

but by arduous study and slow conquest of the immutable laws by which it is surrounded. Buchanan had come to recognise so much; he was indeed on his way, as Dr. Parker said, 'to the Eternal Altar,' the Altar of the Religion of Humanity, which was standing before any other was built, and will endure when every other has crumbled to the dust. I am not ignorant how contemptuously he more than once turned his back on the fane in which that Altar burns :—

> Worship MAN? Go back once more
> To image-worship as of yore,
> And bend my head and bow my knee
> To this King Ape, Humanity?
> This stomach-troubled, squirming, aching,
> Mud-wallowing creature of a day,
> This criticising, this book-making,
> Fretful, dyspeptic thing of clay!
> This multi-face whom it hath taken
> Ages to learn to wash and dress!
> This horde of swine, doomed to be bacon,
> And now, by countless devils o'ertaken,
> Shrieking in impotent distress!
> This mass of foulness and of folly
> Through whom the Paracletes have died!
> This Yuletide carcase decked with holly
> In honour of its Crucified!
> Now great Jehovah lies o'erthrown,
> Shall the mere pigmy reign at last?
> Pshaw! rather worship stick or stone,
> And let Humanity crawl past! *

The old leaven, 'the filthy virus of the obscene

* 'The Outcast.'

vaccination of Faith,' as Gerald Massey years ago called it, worked furiously in his veins at times; the cherished superstitions clung like mandrake in the soil of his mind, and were only torn up with groans as of the parting spirit. Such a passage as this must be set beside the entire bulk of his last ten years' work, and, so placed, its very virulence of denial amounts to an assent. It was the Poet of the dual personality protesting, and protesting vastly too much, against the too-cogent logic of the Thinker.

Algernon Charles Swinburne.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE. A Critical Study, by Theodore Wratislaw.

MR. SWINBURNE'S ultimate position in the hierarchy of English literature will certainly not depend on the judgment of any individual critic, and in that reflection I find a warrant for complete candour in setting my opinion of him in juxtaposition with that of such an enthusiastic worshipper as Mr. Wratislaw. That he is a poet, one of the real authentic God-born race whose credentials are absolute and undeniable, I admit. The claim seems to me to allow of but one answer. But he is rather a unique than a great singer, and a reader whose first flush of youthful enthusiasm has passed hesitates to set him shoulder by shoulder with the greatest of his kind. It has been claimed for him, by older and more responsible critics than Mr. Wratislaw, that he is the supreme verbal artist the language has produced. I should rather say—the supreme verbal juggler. The great stylists are the great thinkers, and Mr. Swinburne deals far more in emotion—and often very nebulous and misty emotion—than in thought. He has never had much to tell us, beyond the facts

that wine is sweet and women are kissable—facts with which the world was fairly well acquainted before his advent. We feel in him the lack of that solid core of vital heat, that fire of lofty conviction which throbs in the verse of Milton and Shelley. And he has dreadfully frequent moments in which his pen runs away with him, in which his 'revel of rhymes' becomes a revel of mere melodious nonsense; moments in which he is no longer the master of his materials, but their servant and slave. It was in such a moment that he penned the dedication of the first series of 'Poems and Ballads' to Edward Burne-Jones, the first four lines of which mean nothing whatsoever in reality, while such semblance of meaning as they possess is absolutely self-contradictory :—

> The sea gives her shells to the shingle,
> The earth gives her streams to the sea;
> They are many, but my gift is single,
> My verses, the first fruits of me.

Grant that 'verses' and 'first fruits' are 'single,' what does the statement amount to? And what is its connexion with the immediately following adjuration :—

> Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf,
> Cast forth without fruit upon air;
> Take rose-leaf and vine-leaf and bay-leaf
> Blown loose from the hair. . . . ?

One might guess that the 'vine-leaf' was in the ascendant when such a verse was written. This is not

the utterance of the divine Sybil, Poesy, but the jibbering of the mad witch, Echolalia. Nor does it stand alone in Mr. Swinburne's work. Did space permit, I could supplement it by the dozen. Apropos of this phase of the question, Mr. Swinburne, in trying to sneer at Byron, paid him one of the solidest compliments ever offered to a poet. 'On taking up a fairly good version of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," in French or Italian prose, a reader whose eyes and ears are not hopelessly sealed against all distinction of good from bad in rhythm or in style will infallibly be struck by the vast improvement which the text has undergone in the course of translation. The blundering, floundering, lumbering, and stumbling stanzas, transmuted into prose and transfigured into grammar, reveal the real and latent force of rhetorical energy that is in them: the gasping, ranting, broken-winded verse has been transformed into really effective and fluent oratory.' Did Mr. Swinburne ever think of trying the same experiment on such specimens of his own verse as I have quoted above? Turned into an alien tongue, stripped of its liquidity of syllable, its alliteration and assonance, how would such verse show? It would have no longer even the semblance of a meaning. Byron, with his 'ramping renegades and clattering corsairs . . . . violent and vulgar resources of rant and cant and glare and splash and splutter' . . . . his 'sickly stumble of drivelling debility' . . . . 'his drawling, draggle-tail drab of a muse, Inyx, the screaming wry-neck'—Byron had at least something to say, and said it—something

so well worth saying that the mere verbal clothing of the idea ceased to matter much—a new sermon on the eternal text, 'The Body is more than the Raiment.'

Mr. Swinburne and his prophet, Mr. Wratislaw, are, I cannot help thinking, both a little 'previous' in declaring Byron to be dead. As good old Sandy Mackay, in 'Alton Locke,' remarks concerning Mr. Windrush's information to the same effect regarding the Devil: 'I'd no bury him just yet — wait till he smells a wee grewsome.' Premature interment is a serious business.

Mr. Wratislaw can hardly be complimented on the delicacy of his critical discrimination. He claims Mr. Swinburne as a great dramatist. So far from being anything of the kind Mr. Swinburne is essentially and hopelessly undramatic—it might be said, anti-dramatic. One of the many gifts necessary to the writing of drama is the power to project oneself into the personality of the personage depicted, to think, act, and speak, not as William Shakespeare or Richard Sheridan, but as Hotspur or Bob Acres. Mr. Wratislaw challenges our admiration for the following lines, put into the mouth of the Doge, Marino Faliero:—

> If these who have wronged me, being wiped out,
> May leave this Venice with their blood washed white,
> Clean, splendid, sweet for sea and sun to kiss
> Till earth adore and heaven applaud her—then
> Shall my desire, till then insatiable,
> Feed full and sleep for ever.

Such involutions of imagery and language could never get across the foot-lights with the faintest effect, and, if they could, the voice is the voice, not of the heroic and tremendous traitor, but of Mr. Swinburne. The passage has no dramatic quality whatever. Mr. Wratislaw's overwhelming tendency to eulogy-at-any-price runs him into quaint extravagances at moments. He tells us, regarding the tragedy of 'Bothwell,' that 'its conventional five acts run to the unconventional length of five hundred and thirty-two pages of about thirty lines apiece,' and on the same page, adds 'only the historian who has the details of Mary Stuart's career at his fingers' ends in competent to appreciate the dramatic ingenuity of condensation and selection exhibited in this volume!' 'Dramatic ingenuity of condensation' is admirable in such a connexion, especially when one remembers that one single speech of John Knox is nearly as long as the tragedy of 'Hamlet' even when played, as recently by Mr. Benson, 'in its entirety.' Mr. Wratislaw might, of course, retort that Mr. Swinburne's dramas are not intended for stage representation. In that case, why choose the dramatic form? A drama not meant to be acted is as futile as a song not meant to be sung.

Concerning 'Atalanta,' Mr. Wratislaw has a phrase more pregnant with meaning than he himself would seem to be aware. 'Such a poem as "Atalanta" is an admirable example of the trite saying that a poet is born, not made. It was published by its author at the age of twenty-eight, but twenty or thirty years of

study and practice of literature have not given to the poet a surer hand, a sweeter note, or a swifter imagination.' So far from having progressed, either as a thinker or a writer, during the last thirty years, Mr. Swinburne has steadily deteriorated in both particulars, presenting in that respect a curious and interesting contrast with the two greatest of his contemporaries, Tennyson and Browning. To read Tennyson's poems in chronological order of composition is one of the most delightful of literary exercises. His voice deepened and sweetened with every passing year, from the clear, bird-like note of the 'Juvenilia' to the organ music of 'The Revenge' and 'The Siege of Lucknow;' and the splendour of his workmanship makes welcome and almost lovable the flat banality of his treatment of the noble Arthurian Legend. There are moments when I think 'In Memoriam' the top summit of English poetic achievement. Age dulled—though only very slightly—his great gift, but in 'Crossing the Bar' he wrote a masterpiece of less than a score of lines worthy to stand beside any other nameable piece of English verse. Browning was an even more remarkable phenomenon; he seems to have issued from the Eternal Intelligence like Minerva from the brain of Jove, full-statured and full-equipped. His work varies in quality, of course, but the hand which wrote 'The Ring and the Book,' though it was the agent of a fuller knowledge and a riper experience, was hardly more deft and certain in its perfection of craftsmanship than that which penned 'Paracelsus.' Even of 'Pauline,' of

whose defects Browning was so conscious that he only republished it under the pressure of transatlantic piracy, it can only be said that it is 'poor Browning:' the Browning quality, the depth of thought, the vigour of expression, the wealth of innate and unearned knowledge of the human heart and brain, are finely evident. Most genuine poets resemble Tennyson rather than Browning in this matter, notably the two greatest of the post-Revolutionary period, Shelley and Keats, who clarified the rather sickly vintage of 'Queen Mab' and 'Endymion' into the sacramental wine of 'Adonais' and 'Hyperion.' But Mr. Swinburne resembles neither of these classes. He has emulated neither the wider and higher flights of Tennyson nor the stately march along the Alps of poetic power of Browning. His career has been a long exercise in the sad art of sinking. Never either a deep or a just thinker, he has run to seed in a mere revel of senseless sound. That Mr. Wratislaw should have emerged from the monumental task of reading Mr. Swinburne's entire literary output in such a condition of unqualified admiration is a certificate to the strength of his literary digestion, as well as to his unshakable fidelity of affection. He exults over even that weltering waste of wild and whirling words, the volume of critical 'Miscellanies,' which, when I read it on its first appearance, took a still-unchallenged position in my memory as the most voluminously voluble statement of nothing-at-all within the scope of my personal experience.

The dictum that Mr. Swinburne is the most musical of all English poets has by this time hardened to the consistency of critical dogma, a commonplace of universal acceptance. That he is a marvellous artist in that respect, that he has treated nearly every established metre with a grace and beauty of execution beyond all praise, and that he has enriched our literature with some new and admirable forms of rhythm, it would be at once idle and unjust to deny. But there is to me, even in his superb mastery of the technique of his art, an element of disquiet—I feel, after reading a certain quantity of his verse, as Charles Lamb describes himself feeling at an instrumental concert—that I must rush out into the familiar clatter of the street traffic to get away from the endless, meaningless succession of sweet sounds. In the homely image, he piles butter on bacon and honey on sugar, driving the aching sense to nausea with the dead, inevitable beat of his rhythm and the irritating recurrence of alliteration and assonance. He seems a sort of poetic Blondin, keeping perilous foothold on an imperceptible wire in mid-air, and surrounded by blazing coruscations of rockets and crackers. It is seldom that his theme interests and exalts him into forgetfulness of his rather vulgar and meretricious trickeries, and such happy moments have become rarer and rarer of recent years; until such portions of his verse as are truly poetic in thought and artistically modest in expression, set beside his endless exercises in rhythmical calisthenics, stand like the proportion of bread to the quantity of sack in Falstaff's

tavern-bill. It is but seldom that one finds, in the vast and glittering sand-heap of his later productions, those

> —jewels five-words-long
> That on the stretched forefinger of all Time
> Sparkle for ever.

Mr. Swinburne's thick-and-thin admirers, of whom Mr. Wratislaw is the type in excelsis, are rather in the habit of talking as if he were the original inventor and patentee of verbal music, whereas no style in all literature has a clearer ancestry than his. He is the direct offspring, as an artist, of Shelley and Keats and the despised Byron, and he has a distinct dash of Thomas Moore. And, great as he unquestionably is as a verbal artist, his finest work is never finer than much of that of his predecessors, and, to my thinking, often contrasts but poorly, merely as music, with the finest achievements of the greatest of his fellow poets. His florid and over-laboured rhetoric seems tawdry, set beside the solemn splendours of Milton's description of how Pandemonium 'rose like an exhalation;' it sounds cracked and thin contrasted with the iron periods of Dryden :—

> Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be—
> Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
> In his defence his people are as bold
> As if he had been born of beaten gold.

I find no echo, in his insistent and self-conscious trickery, of the elusive dream music of Coleridge :—

> —carven figures, strange and sweet,
> All made out of the carver's brain;

or:—

> It fanned his brow, it raised his hair,
> Like a meadow gale in spring;
> It mingled strangely with his fears,
> Yet it seemed like a welcoming;

or Shakespeare's

> Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay
> Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
> To heaven, to pardon blood: and I have built
> *Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests*
> *Sing still for Richard's soul—*

lines in which Mr. Swinburne's favourite trick of alliteration ceases to be a trick at all. Compare any specimen of Mr. Swinburne's onomatopœic verse with these lines from 'The Dream of Fair Women'—

> As one that museth where broad sunshine laves
> The lawn by some cathedral, thro' the door
> Hearing the holy organ rolling waves
> Of sound on roof and floor
>
> Within, and anthem sung—

or with the same poet's

> Heated hot with burning fears,
> And plunged in hissing baths of tears,
> And battered by the shocks of doom
>
> To shape and use.

I find in him none of the nameless, mystic, moon-light charm which permeates 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' and 'The Witch of Atlas.' It is a commonplace among his more laudatory critics that no English poet has ever succeeded as Mr. Swinburne has done in conveying

into our language the sculpturesque sense of the finest Greek verse. It is a point on which I must speak with diffidence, and under grave chances of censure, but to me, who know Greek literature only by the medium of translation, no fragment of Mr. Swinburne's verse has ever conveyed the sentiment of vast strength in calm repose—which I take to be the essential beauty of the great Greek style—as it is conveyed in Browning's superb fragment, 'Artemis Prologises':—

> I am a goddess of the ambrosial courts,
> And save by Herê, Queen of Pride, surpassed
> By none whose mansions whiten this the world.
> Through heaven I roll my lucid moon along;
> I shed in hell o'er my pale people peace;
> On earth I, caring for the creatures, guard
> Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,
> And every feathered mother's callow brood,
> And all who love green haunts and loneliness.
> Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns
> Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,
> Upon my image at Athenai here—

a flawlessly beautiful composition, seeming to suggest long lines of lucent statuary beheld by dim moonlight in a forest glade. And where, among all Mr. Swinburne's cold and glittering mosaic, can one find a passage like the song of Pippa?

> Overhead the tree-tops meet,
> Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;
> There was nought above me, nought below
> That my childhood had not learned to know.
> For what are the voices of birds—

Ay, and of beasts, but words, our words,
Only so much more sweet.
The knowledge of that with my life begun,
And I had so near made out the sun
And counted your stars, the seven and one,
Like the fingers of my hand—
Nay, I could all but understand
Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges,
And just when, out of her soft fifty changes
No unfamiliar face might overlook me—
Suddenly God took me.

Such verse as that brings with it the breath of the beyond, and its rhythm stirs heart and feet like wine.

The first series of 'Poems and Ballads' is the volume by which Mr. Swinburne will live, and its back may be broad enough to carry 'Atalanta' and 'Erechtheus.' It contains pretty nearly all that Mr. Swinburne has to tell us, and the splendid audacity of the cry of the Neo-Pagan—

What ailed us, oh gods, to desert you
For creeds that refuse and restrain?
Come down and redeem us from virtue,
Our Lady of Pain!

will ring in the hearts of men for ever as the expression of the sensuous side of the complex human organism. That is all—or very nearly all—that Mr. Swinburne has ever had to express, and it is that fact which bars him from companionship with the greatest of his kind.

A French View of Ruskin.

Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty. Translated from the French of R. de la Sizeranne by the Countess of Galloway.

RUSKIN has been exceedingly fortunate in finding so admirable an interpreter of his life-work to the French people as M. de la Sizeranne, and M. de la Sizeranne is to be most heartily congratulated on having found such a translator as the Countess of Galloway. Of all writers who have ever lived, perhaps Ruskin has most need of sympathetic introduction to a foreign audience—most especially, perhaps, to a French audience of the actual moment. The poles are hardly wider asunder or more diametrically opposed than the gospel of Art as propounded by the Prophet of Coniston, and its doctrines as proclaimed by the fashionable French critics of to-day and illustrated by French artists of the most extended vogue. The mass and extent of Ruskin's work are of themselves grave obstacles to its proper understanding, even in England, and are well nigh insuperable bars to such a comprehension among foreign readers. Mr. George Allen has

obeyed a happy inspiration in publishing the Countess of Galloway's excellent translation of this admirable book. Criticisms and appreciations of Ruskin abound and are daily multiplied, but I know of none among them which so admirably fulfils its purpose as the volume now under consideration.

If it were ever wise to prophesy concerning such matters it would seem safe to predict that Time, which has covered with disdainful silence so many loud-resounding contemporary reputations, will deal tenderly with the fame of John Ruskin. His position merely as a writer, as a verbal artist, is certainly secure. Merely as literature, one may say of his work what Michael Angelo is reported to have said regarding the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral, in answer to some carping critic who had dwelt upon an alleged error in its construction: 'Sir, it cannot be better done.' No writer of the English tongue has ever surpassed him in the prime quality of style, in the absolute clarity and level strength of his utterance. He played upon the language like Sarasate or Joachim upon the strings of the violin, with complete and facile mastery. His views of every one of all the many human interests with which he dealt—of art, and life, and morals, and contemporary politics—have been frequently disputed and passionately repudiated. Perhaps his actual and tangible effect upon his generation has been less than his strongest partisans would proclaim it to have been—it could hardly have been less than he himself frequently declared it to be—

but he has for many years past been a real factor in the moral and intellectual life of the English-speaking peoples of the globe, and he represents so much that is most truly and deeply characteristic of those peoples that it is not easy to imagine him falling out of their consideration. Only England could have produced him, as only England could have produced Milton. He represents all that is best and highest in the spirit of Puritanism; not the narrow and misanthropic creed which teaches contempt of human joy, but the high and beneficent spirit which turns delight itself into a sacrifice. He will never be widely popular outside the country which gave him birth, because he was so particularly the incarnation of its spirit, and it is one whose workings are almost exclusively confined to the English section of the great Teutonic stock. It has never touched more than an insignificant minority of any Latin race, and then only for a brief moment. It pervades the entire English character as the perfume proper to a certain flower pervades the entire structure of that flower. It gives a touch of austerity to our most characteristic virtues, it adds a smack of relishing horror to our vices. Every Englishman is more or less a Puritan, and so it may be said that Ruskin has some message for every Englishman who possesses the modicum of intelligence necessary to feel an interest in the themes with which he deals. His fame would seem to be secure because the remotest generation of our race

will produce individuals of his mental and moral order, and because it is not thinkable that any teacher can ever arise who will preach with more persuasive eloquence or more convincing force the doctrines which he has made it his life-business to expound.

The strengths of great individualities are often their weaknesses, and it was so in the case of Ruskin. His absolute, uncompromising intransigeance on the main points of his doctrines—artistic, social, political—is the secret of the passionate love and admiration with which he is regarded by the picked minority of his readers who are in full sympathy with those doctrines; but it is the secret also of the limitation of his power over his generation as a whole. He was all his life unwaveringly certain of the truth of his view of things in general; he proclaimed, as with thunders of Sinai, the absolute necessity of the entire world to subscribe to the laws he formulated. He had the Puritan narrowness which refuses to see any truth outside of the truth it preaches. To that order of mind, the catholic charity which would dictate such an utterance as that of Robert Buchanan:

> There dwells, within all creeds of mortal birth
> That die and fall to earth,
> A higher element, a spark most bright
> Of primal truth and light;—
> No creed is wholly false, old creed or new,
> Since none is wholly true—

is something very like a blasphemy. There was no truth but the truth of which John Ruskin was the

prophet. This intolerance was born in him, part and parcel of his nature, and one can hardly imagine a scheme of education more calculated to indurate it than that through which he passed in his early years. We know the facts as they are loosely scattered through the pages of 'Præterita,' let us re-read them as briefly recapitulated by M. de la Sizeranne.

As shy and retiring in society as successful in business, Mr. John James Ruskin lived much alone, happy in the companionship of the romantic and the legendary creations of his favourite authors. His wife, who had been brought up amongst people inferior to the Ruskins, was not at home amongst her new connections. Too intelligent to ignore the fact and too proud to submit to it, she determined to renounce the world,—a religious and devoted mother who kept the 'Christian Treasury' on her table and the hatred of the Pope in her heart, abhorring the theatre and adoring flowers, uniting the spirit of Martha to that of Mary, indefatigable, well regulated, living only for her husband and her son. To avoid separation from the latter during his university career, she brought herself to live a stranger in Oxford, watching continually to save him from all pain, even should she unman him, and from all danger, at risk of taking from him the power to avoid it. Each day with order and regularity she gave him a Bible lesson, and revealed to him by degrees that light of the Old and New Testaments which has ever shone on the summits of his achievement. The child had not a conception of what care was. The Ruskins never spent more than the half of their income, and were free from all money troubles. Finding all their joy in admiration, they were ignorant of all the pangs of jealousy and ambition. To live in a cottage and to taste the 'healthy delight of uncovetous admiration' in visiting Warwick Castle was a greater happiness to them than 'to live in Warwick Castle and have nothing to be astonished at.' Their even temperaments were warmed to

enthusiasm only by ideas or by the contemplation of Nature. 'Never,' says their son, 'had I heard my father's or mother's voice once raised in any question with each other. I had never heard a servant scolded.' 'Under such gentle discipline there reigned in this house peace, obedience, and faith.'

Shielded from all external trouble, the artistic taste of the boy was refined into a sort of ecstatic habit.

At Herne Hill he passed the long winter months dreaming over Turner's illustrations to Rogers' 'Italy,' and a violent desire took possession of him to know in what *aliquas partes materiæ* the great seer had seen his vision. In the valleys of Clifton or of Matlock in Derbyshire he made collections of minerals, calculated heights, and watched reflections. And all that he perceived with a mind so precocious and overflowing, he loved with a heart strangely virgin and void; for he had little sentiment for his family. 'My mother, herself, finding her chief personal pleasure in her flowers, was often planting or pruning beside me, at least if I chose to stay beside her. . . . . Her presence was no restraint to me, but also no particular pleasure, for, from having always being left so much alone, I had generally my own affairs to see after.' Sixty years afterwards he sadly exclaims, 'I had nothing to love. My parents were in a sort visible powers of nature to me, no more loved than the sun and the moon.' And as a child he knew no one else. Even when travelling the Ruskins lived apart from their fellows and preferred watching the great poet Wordsworth from behind the pillar of a church, to asking for an introduction. 'We did not travel for adventures, nor for company, but to see with our eyes, and to measure with our hearts.' Their mode of travelling enabled them to see everything thoroughly, and their ignorance of foreign languages prevented them from regarding the people from any other than the picturesque point of view. They found a peculiar charm in the very fact of being unable to understand the speech of those around them. For so they noted each gesture but for its beauty, each voice but for its music, and neither one nor the other for its significance.

Trained in this special manner, all the child's faculties tended to one result—an acute sensibility, a power of minute analysis of landscape and figures.

One can see in this passage the planting and the germination of much that is beautiful in Ruskin's life and work, but also of much which frustrated his growth and lessened his strength. It was the life of a human plant in a hot-house. The cloistering influence was too constant, too all-enveloping; free winds and natural sunlight were too rigorously excluded. Such a training was bound to leave behind it a super-sensitiveness, an over-delicacy, an ignorance of human needs, an intolerance of human frailty; and that ignorance and that intolerance are marked characteristics of Ruskin's work, and militate strongly against its usefulness. The average man cannot but feel that, ultimately right and true as his teachings may be, they are, after all, perilously like those most useless of human utterances, counsels of perfection. It is good to read them, as it is good to read the Commandments of Moses and the Beatitudes of Christ; but to make of them the rules of daily conduct is a strain beyond the strength of poor humanity. Temperament and fortune combined with early teaching to make such a scheme of existence a realisable possibility to Ruskin, but one cannot but think that had the hazards of life forced him, by the imperious necessity of earning his daily bread, into closer kinship with the mass of struggling humanity, the knowledge and the tolerance so gained would have made his

teachings more fruitful of actual and tangible effect. There is something in them

> Too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food.

There is, in the following passage, a note of admiration I find it hard to echo :—

This mystic reverie of contemplation, rapture, and ecstasy, whether of joy or sorrow, is the principal feature in the individuality of Ruskin. Once immersed in it, nothing rouses him. Events take place around him without his giving them so much as a thought. Sometimes he has passed weeks without so much as knowing what agitated his country. Khartoum fell with the heroic Gordon; the news had not reached him, and when the Soudan was mentioned, he thought of the figure painted by Giotto at Santa Croce, to face St. Francis of Assisi, and asked curiously, 'But who is the Soldan of to-day?' Even family events did not seem to deserve attention. Whilst in the Alps he heard of the death of his cousin Mary, the companion of his youth and of his early travels, but he did not pause in his endeavour to reproduce the effect of sunrise on Montanvert, and the 'aerial quality of Aiguilles.' Even in his old age he remains ever the same—the boy his mother soothed in childish illness by bidding him think of the sky and seas of Dover. The close of 'Præterita' reveals no melancholy echo of what the aged Petrarch described as 'the superfluous cares, the futile hopes, and the unlooked-for events,' which had agitated him during his life on earth. No trace of this—but a last note on the infinite and marvellous forms assumed by the 'upper cirri' of the sky in the pure air of Kent and Picardy when not 'disturbed by tornado nor mingled with volcanic exhalation,' and a thrill of joy in the thought that the clouds which float over the English coasts are as full of beauty as those which hover round the Alps. And in those final pages, where speaking of himself he might

have betrayed or grieved over the secret dramas of his life, the great enthusiast does not seem to avert his gaze for an instant from the radiant horizons of Eternal Nature, the sum of all he has loved on earth.

Such absolute abstraction from human interests is not a strength. It is a weakness, and a deadly one.

These two passages seem to me to shed a revealing light upon Ruskin's entire work, to furnish the key which unlocks the mystery of his being, to explain at once the strength and the weakness so inextricably mingled in his teaching. So an angel might look on life, but hardly a man; and it is by the men who have been most intensely human that the truest and most abiding words of counsel have been spoken. Read this passage on the two pictures of Bellini, the Madonna in the Sacristy of the Frari, with two saints beside her and two angels at her feet; and the Madonna with four saints over the second altar of San Zaccaria. They express the same sentiment of aloofness from human passion and human struggle :—

Observe respecting them—

First, they are both wrought in entirely consistent and permanent material. The gold in them is represented by painting, not laid on with real gold. And the painting is so secure, that four hundred years have produced on it, so far as I can see, no harmful change whatever, of any kind.

Secondly, the figures in both are in perfect peace. No action takes place except that the little angels are playing on musical instruments, but with uninterrupted and effortless gesture, as in a dream. A choir of singing angels by La Robbie or Donatello would be intent on their music, or eagerly rapturous in it, as in temporary exertion : in the little

choirs of cherubs by Luini in the Adoration of the Shepherds, in the Cathedral of Como, we even feel by their dutiful anxiety that there might be danger of a false note if they were less attentive. But Bellini's angels, even the youngest, sing as calmly as the Fates weave.

Let me at once point out to you that this calmness is the attribute of the entirely highest class of art: the introduction of strong or violently emotional incident is at once a confession of inferiority.

Those are the two first attributes of the best art. Faultless workmanship, and perfect serenity; a continuous not momentary action. You are to be interested in the living creatures, not in what is happening to them.

Then the third attribute of the best art is that it compels you to think of the spirit of the creature, and therefore of its face, more than of its body.

And the fourth is that in the face you shall be led to see only beauty or joy—never vileness, vice, or pain.

Those are the four essentials of the greatest art. I repeat them: they are easily learned.

1. Faultless and permanent workmanship.
2. Serenity in state or action.
3. The Face principal, not the body.
4. And the Face free from either vice or pain.

This beautiful, but quite unhuman, quietism is the dominant note of Ruskin's teaching. It is admirably expressed by M. de la Sizeranne in a passage of his own; a passage worth quoting because it not only clearly speaks the spirit of the Master, but because it exhibits both the author and the translator of this fascinating volume at their artistic best.

We are to follow then, in all forms of art; painting, sculpture, architecture, the paths Nature traces for us when we behold her with love, and we must seek after her teaching

even in the smallest technical detail. Her first teaching is that of repose—repose in colour, repose above all in movement. Her transformations are not rapid, her gestures are not vehement. The tree slowly extends itself towards the sun; the sun sinks by degrees behind the mountain; the mountain stands immovable for centuries. Natural phenomena rarely exhibit those rapid changes of scene which are the joy of children in fairyland. Full-grown men will marvel more at the slow miracles of germination or at the gradual growth of islands emerging from the sea, the product of myriads of tiny insects during myriads of years. In art we must then deprive ourselves of all representation of tumultuous events, of violent scenes, of figures which run, dance, fall, struggle, or wound; pictures of battles, of the Last Judgment, of Bacchanalian feasts, of martyrs in great contortions of pain, victims nailed to doors, and Christs dying on the Cross. We must condemn naturalism in death in the name of Nature's life, and also dying Christs in the name of her serenity. Simple shepherds kneeling around a cradle, the play of a fountain under the sky, the touch of a bow on a string, a procession of knights to a church, the slow march of ambassadors along a canal, the depression of Melancholy amid the tools of science, the fall of roses from the finger-tips of an angel one by one on to the soft form of the infant Christ playing below—these are the movements which we may reproduce, because they do not shock our instinct of 'permanence.' The shepherds of Lorenzo di Credi may retain for any length of time their caressing posture; the monks of Mont Salvat and the great nobles of Carpaccia may pass eternally before our eyes without fatigue, Dürer's figure may remain leaning perpetually on her hand as motionless as a caryatid, and the angel of Botticelli shall strew his flowers everlastingly.

Since the fundamental law for one art must necessarily be a fundamental law of all departments

of art, it is a little difficult to reconcile such dicta as these with Ruskin's oft-proclaimed admiration for many writers whose chief strength lies in the portrayal of vivid action and strong passion—notably, Dante and Shakespeare. It is even more difficult to reconcile them with much that Ruskin himself has written, in which either the reality or the affectation of passionless calm would be sought wholly in vain. Save for studied propriety of language, Swift or Carlyle could be hardly more fiercely personal than Ruskin has been upon occasion, and all his life has been passed in passionately fighting in the cause of peace. This, of course, amounts to no more than saying that all the celestial influences which dwelt about his youth and early manhood have after all left him only a man, and a man of peculiarly vivid, if somewhat narrow interests, and even narrower sympathies. We must accept him as we accept all high manifestations of human greatness, since to wish him otherwise than as he is would be quite vain. Loftiness of purpose and splendour of native capacity have won for him a high place in the Valhalla of English Worthies, and no more stainless name is inscribed upon the long bead-roll of English genius.

Ruskin and Carlyle.

TENNYSON, RUSKIN, MILL, AND OTHER LITERARY ESTIMATES. By Frederic Harrison.

THE diffidence with which I might, in other circumstances, approach the consideration of this volume is tempered by the fact that it is only with a (numerically) insignificant number of its pages that I have to deal. A book from a writer of Mr. Harrison's eminence, touching on so many diverse and powerful personalities, might ask from its critic a far fuller acquaintance with its author's former work than I can boast. Some of the judgments contained in this volume seem more than a little strange to me, probably because I know so little of the bulk of the work which has won for its author his high position among the leaders of modern English thought.

The cognate circumstance that, though I was for a longish period of my intellectual life an ardent student of Ruskin's work, I have yet only a very imperfect knowledge of the vast mass of literature he has left behind him, does not add to my diffidence one whit. For this simple reason—that he who has read, with patience and understanding, any single one of Ruskin's really characteristic books, has to all true intent and

purpose read every word that Ruskin ever wrote. His three hundred volumes, ranging as they do over so illimitable a field of human effort and human emotion, are but as one, and almost any one among them is as the whole three hundred. The half-dozen books which the unerring instinct of the cultured public has selected from the mass—'Modern Painters,' 'Sesame and Lilies,' 'Unto this Last,' 'The Crown of Wild Olive,' and 'The Two Paths,' are certainly all that the average student, who has his daily bread to earn, and cannot afford to give his entire scanty leisure to the study even of the most gifted single personality, really needs to read. Truly to know Ruskin's work in its entirety would ask a scholarship as vast as Ruskin's own; to absorb its most valuable parts, its spirit and essence, is within the ability of any thoughtful man who really reads any of the books whose title I have mentioned, or even one of many scores of well-known passages which might be selected from their pages—such a passage, for instance, as that in which he speaks of the degradation of the Carshalton brook and the cockney, tawdry splendour of the neighbouring public-house. All his life long he went on repeating, with inexhaustible fertility of illustration and ever-changing melody of language, the one lesson given to him to teach his generation; that the living God had built this world as a Temple wherein the living soul of Man should worship Him, and that to befoul a stone of the pavement, or darken a pane of the windows of the holy edifice is an insolent and unpardonable blasphemy. 'Reverence' is the word

which sums up the spirit of Ruskin's teaching; reverence for earth, and sky, and water, for grass, and flower, and tree, for the bodies of men and souls of children. He would have us stand, not 'as ever in a great task-master's eye,' but as continually in the presence of an illimitably generous and bounteous Host, Who has opened to us all the glories of His House Beautiful, Who asks only that we shall look with love and such understanding as we possess upon the treasures He displays, and to Whom carelessness or contempt of His hospitality is rank ill-breeding.

I have said that this essay contains certain judgments which surprise me. One of those judgments, inferred rather than plainly spoken, is that Thomas Carlyle is to-day as much of a living influence upon the minds of Englishmen as he was fifty years ago, or at least exercises as much moral and mental power as his contemporary, Ruskin. My own feeling about Carlyle is that most of what he had to say worth the saying was said very much better by Ruskin, and that, except as a mere literary personality—as which he fills, and will continue to fill, a high and unique position—he has ceased to exist as a mental force altogether. His anthropomorphism; his loudly expressed and constantly reiterated insistence on the 'great man' dogma; his proclamation that the history of the world was mainly the history of the remarkable human personalities which had lived in it; were a little belated even at the time at which he preached them; and are surely no longer debateable in any company more highly intellectual than

that of a provincial Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society. The central positions of Carlyle's creed were abandoned by Carlyle himself, not publicly, it is true, but in privately-spoken words which can leave no doubt of their sincerity. When Froude began to speak of what God might do if He willed to do it, Carlyle cut him short with the three simple and tremendous words, 'God does nothing'—an utterance which swept away a fair half of the ground on which the imposing edifice of Carlyle's life-work was founded. On another occasion he 'gave away' his cherished 'great man' theory just as completely. In more than one published utterance he had called, with his usual vitriolic vehemence, on some absolute monarch of some over-crowded European State to sweep his cities of the famine-stricken wretches who were so dire a menace to the prosperity of the country they cumbered, and to transplant them to the wilds of America and Australia, that they might make the desert blossom as the rose, and add to the wealth of the world instead of to its misery. And in one of the last conversations he held with his biographer he remarked how all this had been done, not by any arbitrary exercise of kingly power; not at the cost of millions of violently severed hearts; but by the quiet, steady, benignant action of natural human forces, by the exercise of the free initiative of free-born men. To dethrone the meddlesome celestial drill-sergeant, which was Carlyle's conception of the Deity, and to substitute for him a *Dieu fainéant;* to recognise that evolution and national selection, left to themselves or only gently and

tenderly encouraged, are infinitely better than the fussy and ill-considered action of hot-headed potentates, is to abolish Thomas Carlyle altogether as a sociological teacher. To me, and to many others, it is all but incredible that a man who could hint anything but contemptuous abhorrence of negro slavery—at once the sum of all crimes and the top-summit of imbecility—should ever have been accepted in such a capacity.

The resemblance between Ruskin and Carlyle seems to me to have been purely superficial, and the frequent bracketing of their names—less frequent than it was, and growing daily rarer—is based upon a misconception of the real natures of both of these extraordinary men. I know that Ruskin spoke often of Carlyle as 'the master,' and that he often repeated and applauded fragments of Carlyle's utterances. But there was, *au fond*, very little real sympathy between them. Their great bond was their common hatred of Democracy. Both cackled as loudly—and as vainly—after the generation which, obeying, as all generations must, the inevitable impetus of innate forces, took to the muddy stream of Radicalism, as the old hen who saw the ducklings she had unwittingly hatched plunge into the farm-yard pond. Both saw the coarseness, the irreverence, the ignorance, the blatancy, which were the flaws of the democratic scheme, and—too often—of its loudest expounders. Neither possessed the equanimously hopeful spirit possessed and inculcated by men like J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer, who, looking with 'larger, other eyes' on the march of humanity, know from how many

apparently impassable quagmires Man has emerged triumphant in the past, and so can, by analogy, prophesy hopefully of the future. In a word, both men were impatient; both were guilty of doubting the ultimate wisdom of the God of Whom both talked so often and so much. But Ruskin did, all the same, verily believe in God; Carlyle believed only in himself. Ruskin's impatience was of a noble kind, Carlyle's of an ignoble. Ruskin was grieved that the generation with which his life was cast should deny God. Carlyle was violently angry that anybody should deny Carlyle, or should presume to think otherwise than he thought, should act without his advice, or except under the guidance of some Imperial bully he approved. 'Ruskin, half seraph and half shrew,' was, all the same, half seraph. Carlyle was all shrew, degenerating, as Lowell said of him, 'from a prophet to a bad-tempered old gentleman who called down God's lightning from heaven every time he couldn't lay his hand on his match-box.' Ruskin's frequent virulence of speech resulted from his intense appreciation of an ideal good which a less highly-strung nature would have seen to be unattainable. Carlyle's sins of the same kind were the outcome of inordinate vanity and of a callous contempt of human rights and human suffering. The gods of his idolatry were Frederick the Greedy and Napoleon the Bowelless. Ruskin's perfect State would be one in which every living soul reverently sought for truth and beauty, and passionately loved the teacher who could make them most readable to him in the sometimes

crabbed hieroglyphics of the world. Carlyle's *Civitas Dei* would have been one in which humanity grunted and sweated under the heavy load imposed by some gigantic, iron-willed taskmaster, as Germany grunts and sweats to-day under the rule of William. Ruskin's religion came from his heart, Carlyle's from his liver. What we know of the private lives of the two men widens the gulf between them. Ruskin's greatest worshippers were his relatives and servants, and hundreds—it might be no exaggeration to say thousands—of living men and women love and reverence him as a generous personal friend and a patient personal teacher. Carlyle broke his wife's heart, and I have never heard of any living soul to whom he gave a sixpence or for whose help or comfort he would have walked a mile. Ruskin's books—the simpler volumes, such as I have mentioned above—should be put into the hands of every child as soon as—or before—he can understand their plain meaning. Their extravagances would be corrected by his growing experience, their tenderness and beauty would act on a sensitive nature like rain and sunshine on a flower. Nobody should read Carlyle's books till he is of an age to bring his own experience of the world as a necessary counter-poison, till he can smile at their atrabilious denunciations of things in general, and relish their one truly valuable quality—literary excellence.

A circumstance that renders Ruskin's admiration for Carlyle still more strange is that Carlyle was, both by temperament and training, scornfully indifferent of so much that Ruskin considered of cardinal importance.

At this moment I remember only one single passage in Carlyle's entire work which deals with any artistic matter outside the range of literature, an account, reprinted in one of his 'Miscellany' volumes, of an evening he spent at the opera, written in a tone of boorish contempt for the 'vanity' of any kind of stage-production. The whole note of the article is one of wonder that men and women with immortal souls to save should waste their time in squalling and capering for the amusement of a crowd of full-fed cockney dilettantes. In conversation he spoke frequently with the most galling contempt of Ruskin's cherished belief in the powers of painting, sculpture, and music as aids to the higher life. On these and on all cognate subjects Carlyle's outlook was and remained that of the sternest and most impenetrable Scotch Calvinism. His Puritanism was as different from that of Ruskin as darkness is different from light. It was the Puritanism of ignorance and negation, as opposed to that of knowledge and culture — the Puritanism, not of Milton and Hampden, but of Corporal Bind-their-kings-in-chains-and-their-nobles-with-links-of-iron. Spiritually, as well as physically, he hailed from Ecclefechan, and never succeeded in emancipating himself from the angry contempt of the Scottish peasant against the graces and amenities of life.

One of the most important links of affinity between this curiously ill-matched couple was their tolerance of war—an institution which the majority of public teachers of their time regarded with

unmitigated abhorrence as the essence of all evil. But the sentiment was based on very different foundations in the minds and natures of the two men. To Carlyle war was admirable because, of all human pursuits, it was the one in which a man, with the cold and brutal strain of domination he called 'heroism,' could most absolutely prove his contempt of human suffering. He more than tolerated war—he loved and desired it, and for that reason. Ruskin's feeling about it was very different. He expressed the feeling in many passages of his writings and lectures, and in none more plainly or more forcibly than in the following excerpt from 'The Crown of Wild Olive':—

> It is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men. It is very strange to me to discover this: and very dreadful—but I saw it to be quite an undeniable fact. . . . I found, in brief, that all great nations learnt their truth of word and strength of thought in war, that they were nourished in war, and wasted by peace; taught by war, and deceived by peace; trained by war, and betrayed by peace; in a word, that they were born in war, and expired in peace.

I can remember yet the tumult of emotion with which, years ago, I first read this and similar utterances, how wickedly false I thought them, how strange and terrible it seemed that so gentle and benignant a spirit as John Ruskin's should have spoken them. It was not without reluctance that I came to see that they were absolutely true to the facts of history, and therefore, like any other facts,

to be accepted, and fitted, as best they might be, into the queer, heterogeneous mosaic of personal belief. There seems to be no getting away from the root fact that war is a necessity, in the sense that starvation and so many other horrors are necessities—in the sense that they are the inevitable outcome of the very constitution of human nature, that none of all the multitudinous generations of humanity has ever been free of them. And, so much having been, however reluctantly, recognised, it is an easy step to go further, and own the value of war as a means of personal and national education. All the declamation of the Manchester politicians and the Peace societies leave untouched the fact that many of the greatest and noblest human types have been evolved by war, and have expressed their great and noble qualities by the making of war; and that other fact that no congeries of men has ever crystallised into anything really to be called a nation except by strenuous resistance of lateral pressure from without, and by resolute elimination of disintegrating forces within—in a word, by War. Courage is the raw material of all the virtues, and war is the school of courage. The man, or the nation, who either cannot or will not fight must perish. It is a flat contradiction of all human experience to speak of war as an unmitigated evil, or of peace as in itself, and of necessity, the sum of all blessings. A favourite theme with the fashionable moralists of my youth was the good which the money and energy wasted on war and in preparation for war might accomplish if diverted to the

furtherance of human happiness. But there never was a time in which money and energy were so diverted to their full values, and in all probability never will be such a time. It is not a matter of the beautifully simple choice between Maxim guns and schoolhouses, between means of mutual destruction and mutual education and improvement. The money and the energy expended in war may be frittered away more uselessly, and far more ignobly and harmfully, on the vices fostered by peace, on sensuality and gross living, and in snobbish display. Tommy Atkins, in his suit of khaki, is surely a more respectable figure than Jeames in his panoply of plush and Brummagem bullion; and my Lord Tom Noddy, cheerfully sharing Tommy's short commons, or valiantly leading him through a storm of bullets, is a quite infinitely better man than he would be yawning away his days in the window of his club-house and furiously expending his nights in even more questionable resorts. Tommy the proletarian and Tom the peer have only a very moderate affection for each other in the piping times of peace at home; but put them together among the slush and snow of a Crimean winter, or between the naked rocks and burning sky of the Transvaal, with a common foe to fight and conquer, and they learn each other's value, and find other names to call each other than 'snob' and 'cad.' Norman and Saxon, 'foreign tyrant' and 'churl' to each other in the days of peace, found the common name of 'Englishman' on the battlefields of France. But yesterday,

a congeries of States became a nation by the same grim process. Blood is a cement, and the sword can weld together as well as cleave apart. To England, with her vast and ever-increasing material wealth; to Englishmen, with their strong and somewhat coarse appetites; war may be the most salutary of disciplines. England at death-grips with Napoleon was surely a nobler spectacle than England during the long peace which followed Waterloo, when for more than a generation our one object was the acquisition of money, and the sordid and stupid greed of the newly-created capitalist class threatened to change a beautiful island into a desert of ashes, peopled by a handful of bloated plutocrats and a few millions of anæmic operatives. 'The disease of our State is a plethora.' We are continually on the verge of national apoplexy. We shall inevitably die of it some day, as Rome did, but periodic blood-lettings have held the final catastrophe at bay so far, and the fatal Writing on the Wall, though legible to keen eyes, has not yet brightened to the blaze of final doom.

Ruskin has gone from among us, and, more truly than were the words spoken by Tennyson of Wellington, we may say 'the last great Englishman is low.' There is no figure now erect among us so venerable as his. He stood for some years, the Sir Bedivere of the fallen host, the survivor of the intellectual army which filled the spacious times of great Victoria. Scott and Byron and Shelley were

living men and living influences during his early life; he lived and worked side by side with Tennyson and Dickens, Thackeray and Browning, Mill and Darwin, and saw them one by one fall into the gulf of the eternal silence, which has at last absorbed him too. His own verdict upon his long and strenuous life-work was that he had failed. He said so, often and bitterly. But 'failure' and 'success' are of all terms the most comparative. To contrast the sum of his accomplishment with the sum of what, in his ardent youth, he had dreamed of effecting, is a folly—in him, a noble folly, in us, a most ignoble one. He failed, as every great teacher of humanity has ever failed—as the greatest of all, of whom he was so worthy a disciple, failed. He did not drive stupidity and greed and insolence from the hearts of men, nor the unsightliness, which is their material expression, from the surroundings of their lives. He did not succeed in making the huge and heterogeneous mass of humanity see, as one man, eye to eye with him; or in making it accept doctrines which were but too often as impracticable as they were beautiful. But he succeeded largely, and for many years, in tempering and restraining in his generation the evil qualities he hated; in lighting and sustaining, in many hearts, the flame of pure enthusiasm for all things lovely and of good report which burned so brightly in his own.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

Rudyard Kipling: An Attempt at Appreciation. By G. F. Monkshood (W. J. Clarke).

IN his brief preface to this volume, the author, with a remarkably modest estimate of his own personal powers as a hysterical panegyrist, describes it as 'an attempt at appreciation.' It is a book of many vices, and of not one solitary virtue. It is not critical, it is not 'appreciative' in any sense which can be rightly applied to that nowadays much-abused word. It is merely an additional—and quite unnecessary—proof that whatever poor value criticism ever could of its nature possess has been of late years squeezed out of it, leaving behind nothing but the 'confounding opposites' of fulsome flattery and venomous detraction—

> So over-violent, or over-civil,
> That every man to it is god or devil.

Being serenely certain that Mr. Kipling—supposing him to care one jot about any individual opinion of his work—would vastly prefer the sharpest admonition to praise so absolutely worthless, I shall spare but little further space for reference to Mr. Clarke.

The points of view from which literary work may

be judged are, of course, infinite and infinitely diverse, but there are two questions to ask regarding the work of all men, which overtop all others in importance, and are, 'What has he to say?' and 'How does he say it?' Being personally, for what I am worth in either regard, an artist first and a moralist afterwards, I am by nature inclined to give preference to the second of those almost all-important considerations. I am a worshipper of form, of strength and grace, of technical excellence, and am so much of a heathen that I would any day rather read a lie cleverly expressed than a truth clumsily written. And that confession, in the present connexion, is tantamount to saying that I am a fervid admirer of Mr. Kipling's work, merely as literature. He seems to me to possess in the superlative degree certain literary qualities of prime importance. Merely as a workman Mr. Clarke himself could hardly over-praise him. There is no writer in the whole range of English literature who can say with completer clarity the thing he wants to say, who can strike with a surer finger the exact note he desires to touch on the emotional key-board. No man who has not tried, and tried hard, to express himself through the medium of fiction, can know at its full value Mr. Kipling's exquisite power in that direction. The style of his best work is wholly admirable; he has the genius of 'le mot juste;' he can do more in a paragraph, a sentence, a phrase, or a word, to establish about his reader the atmosphere in which he desires him for the moment to move than most living writers of fiction could accomplish in the course

of a lengthy book. His words convey light, colour, and perfume. Somebody said of Lord Beaconsfield that 'he talked like a horse racing.' That is how Mr. Kipling writes, covering his ground with a motion at once easy and rapid. There is no waste in his work; it is tense and athletic, accomplished with the ease and completeness of a workman who is a perfect master of the tools he uses and of the material he works in. He has a rich and varied vocabulary, and except at odd moments, when he is overcome by a rather foolish desire to parade his verbal riches by writing 'poems' full of unintelligible technical gibberish, makes the best possible use of it. He is a truly marvellous linguistic juggler, doing all sorts of wonderful things with the language, and tossing about his verbs and adjectives as dexterously as Cinquevalli handles his heterogeneous properties on the stage of the Alhambra. There is more than one point of resemblance between the two great 'manipulators.' They are both very strong, very clever, perfect masters of their craft, and they are both greatly beloved and admired by the music-hall public.

Mr. Clarke confesses that a certain percentage of Mr. Kipling's enormous success must be ascribed to luck. He enumerates certain elements which go to compose that luck, but the enumeration is incomplete. Mr. Kipling's luck is of many kinds, and all the kinds are good. He has had the luck of his subject, and, most important of all, the luck of his temperament. His moral and intellectual diapason is that of the crowd he caters for, that of the average Englishman of

all social ranks—that of the great music-hall public, the most numerous, the richest, the most enthusiastically generous to its favourites of all possible publics. Ethically, he is on the common level of the millionaire in the boxes, the gilded votary of pleasure in the stalls and promenade, the prosperous tradesman in the upper circle, the city clerk in the pit, the street boy in the gallery. Their gods are his, and he has the literary talent which enables him to compile, in strong, coherent, and sonorous English, the litany of their worship. He could afford to be an infinitely poorer literary artist than he is, without losing one grain of his popularity with his real paying public; he might have been an infinitely finer artist, and have missed their suffrage entirely, or even have earned their hatred. He tells them what they love to hear, and what they cannot hear too often, that they are the salt of the earth, and the natural inheritors thereof; that, merely as Englishmen, they are the aristocracy, not only of Europeans, but of humankind; that they are the strongest, wisest, justest, kindest, bravest, and altogether most admirable of God's creatures. And he believes it, too—with whatsoever other failings one may charge Mr. Kipling it is impossible to doubt the absolute sincerity of his genuflexions before the great god Jingo.

There are moments when the critic who would make plain the position in which he stands towards his subject must momentarily intrude his own personal feelings and beliefs in plain and definite language, and this seems to me to be one of them. I accept, as the

statement of a plain fact, Emerson's royal compliment to the effect that England is the best of actual nations. I am proud to remember that Voltaire wrote, 'Si j'avais eu à choisir le lieu de ma naissance, j'aurais choisi l'Angleterre.' I believe that no better fate could befall Africa, or China, or any other country which has lagged behind in the race of civilisation, than to fall into the hands of England. And so, I hope I shall escape the imputation of anti-patriotism when I go on to say that the wild self-laudation which is nowadays so common among Englishmen, which is roared and bellowed from so many platforms, and echoed in the columns of so many newspapers and the pages of so many books, is essentially bad, base, snobbish, and vulgar; and that the wide popularity even of so admirable an artist as Mr. Kipling, in so far as it has been earned by pandering to so lamentable a failing, is a thing to be regretted. Brag is the vice of cads, and the person—or the nation—who howls from morning until night about his—or its—own exceeding strength and valour lays himself—or itself—open to the charge of rank ill-breeding. Hardly any English writer of the first class has ever been guilty of it. The good taste of Shakespeare's outbursts of patriotism is truly remarkable, considering the period of political storm and stress during which they were written. The one note of vulgarity in Tennyson, to my thinking, is to be found in his poem 'The Third of February, 1852'—

> I say we never feared, and as for *these*—
> We broke them on the land, we drove them on the seas.

To refer to the population of a great neighbouring State by a disdainfully accentuated demonstrative pronoun is a curious slip in manners, and doubly curious in so delicate and so just-minded a writer. It should surely be the business of cultured and thoughtful men rather to repress than to aggravate international animosities, to dwell upon the eternal verity of human brotherhood rather than on the red fool-fury which culminates in such devils' sabbaths as Waterloo and Trafalgar. Perhaps my fashion of 'keeping' days of national glory is peculiar, but when, on the anniversary of Nelson's victory and death, his statue is converted into a gigantic Jack o' the Green; when all the concertinas of 'Arrydom are braying ''Twas in Trafalgar's Bay,' and beery Cockneys are expressing their eagerness to give the frog-eaters another solid good hiding; I think of the woman Nelson loved and left to the tender care of his country, and of how godly and grateful England let her starve in squalid poverty, and bow my head in shame. I would make a poem of that history, if I had the skill, and—if I had the power—would have it recited in every market-place in England on the anniversary of Nelson's death. It would make a healthy counterblast to the apotheoses of British virtue to which the Press is so fond of treating us on similar occasions, which, as Matthew Arnold pointed out years ago, are not only ineffably vulgar, but are also retarding. Best of actual nations as we are, we have our share of public shames and private wrongs. A burden worth the white man's taking up may be found nearer

home than Equatorial Africa, and it is well that we should occasionally be reminded of that fact—'lest we forget.'

It is never a gracious task to play the part of Devil's Advocate, and it is least of all pleasing when one is forced by a sense of critical honesty to do it in the case of a writer whom in his place and for his own particular merits, one greatly admires. I have received much pleasure from Mr. Kipling's work in the past, and hope to receive much more in the future. As a story-teller, as a writer with the power of transporting me beyond the cares and worries of every-day existence, he has a high place in my affection. It is very seldom, while I am actually engaged in reading his stories, that I am even conscious of my ethical differences with him. His buoyancy of spirit, his vivid and rapid style, carry me along like a straw on the surface of a torrent. But, the book once laid aside, the evanescent charm of story and style evaporated, the spell is broken. The manner of the speaker is forgotten, his matter is remembered. There are moments, while his book is in my hands, when the appellations of 'poet' and 'man of genius' with which—in common with scores of scribblers who possess not one-hundredth part of his power—he has been so liberally bombarded, seem to be his unquestionable right. Most of the criticism of the present day is, of course, written immediately after the perusal of the books it deals with; and I fancy that that circumstance explains a good deal of the wild enthusiasm with which

Mr. Kipling's work is habitually received. Such a method of dealing judgment is far from the best possible, especially in reckoning with the work of a man whose great force, like that of a certain famous statesman for whom Mr. Kipling has only a very moderate esteem, is 'glamour.' Looking back on Mr. Kipling's work in cold blood, 'genius' and 'poet' are among the last words I should be disposed to apply to him. He is as far away from being a man of genius as only an extremely clever man could be. For, though there are degrees and gradations in genius as in everything else, it is absolute in its division from talent. Fancy anybody, except Lord Frederick Verisopht, calling Shakespeare 'a clever man'! One would as soon talk of Niagara as being 'sweetly pretty.' Compared with men who really have a right to the name of 'genius,' Mr. Kipling is what a photographer is to a master of the brush. He can see and reproduce the surface of things with a marvellously minute vision and a wonderful accuracy, but he is barren of the insight, the faculty divine, which reads their inner soul and significance. He passed the most impressionable years of his life in the most picturesque, the most infinitely and pathetically interesting country in the world, and all—or very nearly all—that he has to tell us of it is the 'gup' of Simla, the chatter of Mrs. Hauksbee's tea-table, the slang and blasphemy of the barrack canteen. They are reproduced with admirable truth and cleverness, they are used, as is all Mr. Kipling's material, with the quickest appreciation of

character and dramatic effect, but they are not all that a man of genius would have found to write about in India. Mr. Kipling seems to me to be completely lacking in one, and only very slightly endowed with another, of two qualities indispensable to the greatest kind of writer—the sense of revolt and the sense of pity. He is a born Tory, he looks upon the world and says, 'It is good, for the strong triumph therein.' A phrase which I once applied to Thomas Carlyle is even more closely applicable to Mr. Kipling—he habitually writes, and apparently thinks, as if the name of Christ had never been spoken on this earth. Though personally an artist of exquisite powers, he has no enthusiasm for art. An improvement in the gear of an ironclad or a Maxim gun would give him infinitely greater pleasure than the discovery of a masterpiece by Raffaelle or Phidias. If the Greece of antiquity, the Greece which in a few brief years amassed for humanity the richest and purest legacy of high thought and matchless art it has inherited, could be revived, it would hardly interest him for a moment; the smallness of its colonies would fill him with contempt for the clique of clever duffers who wasted their time in talking about the properties of the soul and their muscle in chipping marble. In a word he is, as his admirers are never tired of proclaiming, essentially 'English.' And to be 'English,' in the sense in which the Jingo uses the word, is to be vulgar, brutal, and morally retrograde; qualities which are perfectly compatible with a high degree of merely literary excellence, as well as

with the practice of all the heathen virtues. But there are other qualities in the English character than brag and earth-hunger, else were it worse for England in the Day of Judgment than for Sodom and Gomorrah, and I prefer the writers who dwell upon them. I would rather wander about the lanes and fields of England with the rustics of Wordsworth and Tennyson, or even descend into the slums of London with Jo, or Covey, or Liza of Lambeth, than sit in the shag-laden air of the canteen and listen to the raucous cockneyisms of Private Ortheris, for whom I have, nevertheless, a very warm regard and respect, tempered by a strong distaste or his vocabulary, and an even stronger sense of pity for his dismally restricted moral outlook:—

Ah God! the love I bear him for his brave heart and strong hand—
Ah Christ, the hate that smites me for his stupid, dull conceit!

French and English.

Paris of the Parisians. By J. F. Macdonald.
Life in Paris. By Richard Whiteing.

IT happened that, at the moment at which these volumes were put into my hands, I had just been reading another book very like them in fundamental character, though as different from them in tone, and in the emotional condition it produces in the reader, as one book can easily be from another—Thackeray's 'Paris Sketch-Book.' Neither Mr. Macdonald nor Mr. Whiteing, I am sure, nor any reasonable admirer of their work, would expect any self-respecting critic to compare the three books, or—generally—their three authors, to the disadvantage of the elder writer. The 'Paris Sketch-Book' is not in any sense a great book, but it is all the same the work of a really great man; of a man dowered to a high degree with those gifts of power and insight whose sum-total we call genius. And yet, while carefully guarding myself from the suspicion of claiming for Mr. Macdonald or Mr. Whiteing any such lofty place in the intellectual hierarchy as must be allowed to Thackeray, I do claim for 'Paris of the Parisians' and 'Life in Paris' that

they are books better worth reading and remembering—in their essence and spirit—than is the 'Paris Sketch-Book.' If, by the mouths of its scholars, travellers, or men of genius, one nation must needs criticise another, it is surely better that the criticism should be hopeful and kindly rather than despairing and vindictive; that the verdict should be coloured by the prejudice of affection rather than by a *parti-pris* of contempt; that the result left upon the mind of the reader should be one of kinship and kindness. Thackeray probably knew his Paris as well as either of her later critics; he certainly knew, appreciated, and loved much that was best worth knowing and loving in French art and French literature, and—being an honest man under all his hide-bound Anglicism of thought and feeling—paid frequent and eloquent testimony to French genius. He could even draw two such wholly French and yet wholly admirable and lovable characters as Paul de Florac and his mother, Léonore de Florac, Colonel Newcome's first love. And yet, the net impression left upon the mind of the reader who recalls the sum-total of Thackeray's utterances on France and the French is one of hatred and contempt. He could see and proclaim the superior inborn tact and politeness which make of every decent French *prolétaire* something strongly resembling a gentleman; the gaiety and native *savoir vivre* which make of a popular holiday in France a spectacle truly delightful to witness, so different from the beery brutality of an English mob; the innate and universal feeling for beauty which has made

'Frenchman' almost a synonym for 'artist.' But the eminently British cast of his mind debarred him from taking a further step, from asking whether, quality for quality, one race was not worth the other; if the distinguishing French aptitudes of taste and touch did not offer a sufficient excuse for the lack—the alleged lack, that is—of the sterner virtues which our national vanity, quite as *exigeante* as that of the French, makes us claim as peculiarly our national property. Bourgeois of the bourgeois, with all his genius; a true son of the land that gave him birth and a finished product of the social class among which his days were spent; such a question certainly never occurred to him. Sneering, as he often did, at English self-sufficiency and insularity, he did more to foster them than any other writer I can remember. The 'Paris Sketch-Book' dates from one of the poorest and barrenest periods of our intellectual history. Our literature of that epoch, except for the work of one or two writers whose happily constituted genius could move at ease in the stodgy bourgeois atmosphere of the time, was at a very low ebb. Our art was worthless, conventional, almost dead, only stirring faintly where it was touched by the enthusiasm of the despised and decried Pre-Raphaelites. And just at that very moment, Paris was alive with genius, humming with new and powerful voices. No doubt much of its art was hectic and unhealthy; much of its thought was wild, profane, and half insane; many of the new voices raved and jibbered very questionable doctrine. But Paris was at least intellectually alive,

and, if one needs must judge between two such unsightly objects, a patient tossing in a fever-fit is surely preferable to a corpse. At a time when, literally, the English theatre had ceased to exist, Thackeray could find nothing to say of the dramas of Hugo and Dumas than that they were 'profoundly immoral and absurd.' 'After,' says he, 'after having seen most of the grand dramas which have been produced at Paris for the last half-dozen years, and thinking over all that one has seen—the fictitious murders, rapes, adulteries, and other crimes, by which one has been interested and excited—a man may take leave to be heartily ashamed of the manner in which he has spent his time, and of the hideous kind of mental intoxication in which he has permitted himself to indulge.' Surely, 'Hernani' and 'Marion Delorme' —even 'Caligula' and 'La Tour de Nesle'—were better than the abject rubbish—and even that mostly stolen from the despised French—which at that time occupied the stages of our theatres in London. Elsewhere, in another of his books, Thackeray spoke of the English as 'the stupidest nation in Europe,' and there are moments when, despite all his power of moving our laughter and our tears, all his unquestioned wit, genius, and scholarship, one is tempted to retort—'True, and you yourself one of the stupidest people belonging to it.'

It is not, fortunately, in any such mood of snobbish superciliousness that Mr. Macdonald and Mr. Whiteing have approached their task. The keynote of 'Paris

of the Parisians' is struck in the preface, from which the following rather lengthy quotation is taken :—

I have not looked down upon the capital of France from the top of the Eiffel Tower ; nor yet from the terrace of the Sacré Cœur ; nor yet from the balcony among the chimères of Notre Dame ; nor yet from Napoleon's column on the Place Vendôme ; nor yet from the Revolution's monument that celebrates the taking of the Bastille. No doubt from these exalted places the town affords an amazing spectacle. Domes rise in the distance, and steeples. Chimneys smoke ; clouds hurry. Up there the spectator has not only a fine bird's-eye view of beautiful Paris ; he has a good throne for historical recollections, for philosophical reveries, for the development of political and scientific theories also. But for the student of to-day's life, whose interest turns less to monuments than to men, there is this drawback—seen from this point of view the inhabitants of Paris look pigmies. Far below him they pass and repass : the bourgeois, the bohemian, the boulevardier, all small, all restless, all active, all so remote that one is not to be distinguished from the other. Coming down from his tower, the philosopher may explore Paris from the tombs of St. Denis to the crypts of the Pantheon, from the Galleries of the Louvre to the shops in the Rue de Rivoli, from the Opera and Odéon to the Moulin Rouge and sham horrors of the cabarets of Montmartre,—leaving Paris from the Gare du Nord, he may look back at the white city under the blue sky with mingled regret and satisfaction—regret for the instructive days he has spent within her, satisfaction in that he knows her every stone ; and yet, when some hours later in mid-channel the coasts of France grew dim, he may leave behind him an undiscovered Paris—not monumental Paris, not political Paris, not Baedeker's Paris, not profligate Paris, not fashionable cosmopolitan Paris of the Right Bank, not Bohemian Anglo-American Paris of the left Bank, but Paris as she knows herself—Paris of the Parisians.

Not only conscientious foreign explorers ignore this Paris; cosmopolitan residents are often unacquainted with her true characteristics. Both are given to keeping to themselves; and Parisians must be approached and not waited for; and soothed at first, and even flattered a little. And then all overtures must be made in French—for Parisians abhor foreign tongues. And all reflections on London Sundays, London fogs, London smoke, however exaggerated, must be accepted mildly—for Parisians cannot bear to be contradicted. And all reference to Mddle. Larive's famous song, 'Voilà les Englisch,' must be welcomed with a smile—for Parisians hate the over-sensitive. Finally, it would be fatal to resent the compassion bestowed upon you because you happen not to have been born in Paris. Humour them so far, and they will bid you not be cast down. Thank them for their compassion, and they, in their turn, will boast that after awhile they will make a perfect Parisian of you, and inspire you with so profound a love for them and their surroundings that you will weep as you take your homeward ticket at the Gare du Nord; and tremble in the train; and sigh not only on account of sickness in the Channel; and groan in the Strand; and recall the past by your fireside; and go to bed melancholy with memories; and dream fondly until dawn of Paris, Paris, Paris. All this they prophesy amiably; then taking you at once in hand, introduce you to their friends. These also receive you pleasantly, and soon you are surprised at the number of genial Parisians with whom you have shaken hands, and to whom you have said, 'Charmé, monsieur, de faire votre connaissance.' Time, moreover, does not dispel the impression made upon you by their amiability and kindness. You are 'mon cher' soon, then 'mon vieux.' You share their secrets before long. You must take their arm. You are as good as naturalised. You are 'one of them.' You are 'chez vous,' 'chez eux.'

Optimism is a virtue—of sorts—no doubt, but there are moments when cheerfulness takes on something of

an aspect of mockery. As will be seen later on, I have another opinion with which to compare Mr. Macdonald's regarding the mutual 'abordability' of the French and English, but it is interesting to remark in passing the means by which, according to Mr. Macdonald, the conciliation must be secured. That most hopelessly unmalleable of living creatures, the average Englishman, is to change his entire bearing—indeed, his entire nature. Loathing flattery, even when addressed to himself, he is to become the adroitest of flatterers. And, though generally incapable even of learning by rote the few sentences of guide-book dialogue necessary to carry him through a foreign country, he is to do his flattery in French!

Virtues of which the spectator has no notion are to be found in Paris of the Parisians. And the Parisian does not conceal them through *mauvaise honte*. Love of Nature, love of children, both absorb him; how regularly does he hurry into the country to sprawl on the grass, lunch by a lake, stare at the sunset, the stars, and the moon; how frequently he admires the view from his window, the Jardin du Luxembourg, and the Seine; how invariably he spoils his *gosse* or another's *gosse*, anybody's *gosse*, infant, boy, or girl! He will go to the Luxembourg merely to watch them. He likes to see them dig, and make queer patterns in the dust. He loves to hear them laugh at Guignol, and is officiously careful to see that they are securely strapped on to the wooden horses. He does not mind their hoops, and does not care a jot if their balls knock his best hat off. He walks proudly behind Jeanne and Edouard, on the day of their first Communion, all over Paris; laughing as Jeanne lifts her snow-white skirt and when Edouard, *ætat.* 10, salutes a friend; and he worships Jeanne, and thinks that there is no better son in the world than Edouard, and he will

tell you so candidly and with earnestness over and over again. 'Ma fille Jeanne,' 'Mon fils Edouard,' 'Mes deux *gosses*,' is his favourite way of introducing the joy of his heart and the light of his home. And then he knows how to live amiably, and how to amuse himself pleasantly, and how to put poorer people at their ease, as on fête days. He will go to a State theatre on 14th July (when the performance is free), and joke with the crowd that waits patiently before its doors, and never push, and never complain, and never think of elbowing his way forward at the critical moment to get in. He will admire the fireworks and illuminations after; and dance at street corners without ever uttering a word that is rude or making a gesture that is rough.

There is a kindlier—and therefore a better—note here than is audible in Thackeray's strident proclamation of British superiority. The whole book is informed with this pleasant, neighbourly warm-heartedness, a sense of sunlight; exterior and internal, pervades its pages, and leaves, after their perusal, something of that nameless charm which follows a day spent among the quaint buildings of the old Paris and on the leafy boulevards of the new. The worst of it is that such feelings are so evanescent, and give the reader but little encouragement to share the hope of a kindly critic, quoted by Mr. Macdonald in his preface, that they may have some tendency to 'counteract the wrong-headed reports of French and English antipathies by which two sympathetic neighbour-peoples are being estranged and exasperated' A man who, with all the will in the world to share such hopes, keeps his eyes open and does his best to look at things as they really

are, cannot but entertain some grave doubts on the subject. There is a passage in Thackeray's 'Sketch-Book' which is worth remarking in this connexion, a passage of a sentiment diametrically opposed to that expressed in the passage from Mr. Macdonald's preface, cited above. 'After two, four, ten years spent in Paris,' says Thackeray:—

> Intimacy there is none; we see but the outsides of the people. Year by year we live in France, and grow grey, and see no more. We play écarté with M. de Trèfle every night; but what know we of the heart of the man—of the inward ways, thoughts, and customs of Trèfle? If we have good legs, and love the amusement, we dance with Countess Flicflac, Tuesdays and Thursdays, ever since the Peace, and how far are we advanced in acquaintance with her since we first twirled her round a room? We known her velvet gown, and her diamonds (about three-fourths of them are sham, by the way); we know her smiles and her simpers and her rouge—but no more; she may turn into a kitchen wench at twelve on Thursday night, for aught we know; her *voiture*, a pumpkin; and her *gens*, so many rats; but the real, rougeless, *intime* Flicflac we know not. This privilege is granted to no Englishman: we may understand the French language as well as M. de Levizac, but can never penetrate into Flicflac's confidence; our ways are not her ways; our manners of thinking not hers; when we say a good thing, in the course of a night, we are wondrous lucky and pleased; Flicflac will trill you off fifty in ten minutes, and wonder at the *bêtise* of the Briton, who has never a word to say. We are married, and have fourteen children, and would just as soon make love to the Pope of Rome as to aught but our own wife. If you do not make love to Flicflac, from the day after her marriage to the day she reaches sixty, she thinks you a fool. We won't play at écarté with Trèfle on Sunday nights; and are seen walking, about

one o'clock (accompanied by about fourteen red-haired children with fourteen gleaming prayer-books), away from the church. 'Grand Dieu!' cries Trèfle, 'is that man mad? He won't play at cards on a Sunday; he goes to church on a Sunday: he has fourteen children!'

There is a profound truth in these words of Thackeray's—truth put with admirable humour and—of course—with a touch of bitterness, and the all-pervading sense that the right of the matter is with us. (Note, in passing, the touch about Madame la Comtesse's diamonds). I am, for my own part, grimly incredulous of the capacity of the most charming book in the world to draw together, in any appreciable degree, two sets of people so profoundly, so fundamentally, so chemically different as the French and the English. In the first place, it is only an infinitesimal fraction of either population—or of any population, for the matter of that—that reads at all; and again, only a small fraction of that fraction is sufficiently intelligent to want to know anything about a foreign people. Every race is different from—every race is antagonistic to—every other race. Ask the ordinary British citizen his opinion of some of the types of character to which Mr. Macdonald would introduce him in this charming book; of 'Bibi la Purée,' the friend, valet, secretary and odd-jobman of the lamented Paul Verlaine, of whom Mr. Macdonald gives a truly charming character sketch. Ask him what he thinks of the 'Daughters of Murger,' who live in unhallowed union with the poets, actors, and painters of La Rive Gauche. Such people have no

place at all in his scheme of things. An English girl either marries or remains celibate, or—there are other alternatives, no doubt, but decent people — English people—know nothing about them, do not recognise the existence of any half-way house between marriage and celibacy. Neither 'le parler' nor 'la morale Montmartroise' is taught in British boarding-schools, and British people, with the puritan paste in their compositions—how should they ever mix freely with the jolly pagans who speak and practise such abominations? In the day of the making of men and nations, the pastes no doubt got mixed a little here and there. Here and there one finds an Englishman capable of understanding and loving that radically un-English monstrosity, a Frenchman. Here and there—but more rarely, I cannot but think—you may find a Frenchman capable of returning the compliment. But these are mere exceptions, proving the rule. Thackeray's 'Sketch-Book,' Francis Child's poem, in which he speaks of Mr. Macdonald's beloved Paris as

> The bug-bright thing that know nor love nor pity,
> Flaunting her bare shame to the summer sky—

these are the true expressions of the average Englishman's feelings towards France and the French. Tennyson wished the narrow sea which separates us was 'a whole Atlantic broad' It is broad enough to prevent the hearts or thoughts of the two races from ever mingling :—

> L'onde met entre nous, toujours, tout son sinople.

A friend of mine, who belongs to that—to me—exasperatingly mysterious class, the cultured ultra-Jingo, remarked to me recently that his idea of a perfect scheme of things would be one in which the entire globe would have fallen into the hands of the English race, specimens of other peoples being preserved under glass frames in a museum of curiosities. That such an ideal should recommend itself to the ordinary Englishman might, perhaps, be no great matter for wonder, but that a man acquainted with the artistic and literary products of many ages and divers countries should hold it is nothing less than amazing. It shows, as I have before remarked in this connexion, a lack of the real philosophic and critical spirit which, in comparing one race with another, is careful to weigh the qualities of one against those of its competitor, and reluctant to decide rashly as to which of the two sets of qualities may be most valuable to the race at large. The distinction between the English and the French ideals of social virtue is broadly marked. We—'la race forte,' as Hugo called us—go for strength; the great French preoccupation is grace, beauty, the decorative element, and it seems to me that the Englishman who proclaims his contempt of the Gallic influence is very much on a par with the man of any race who thinks to establish a reputation for 'manliness' by despising women. Art, as Mr. Whiteing shows in more than one eloquent passage, is in Paris pursued as strenuously and in as hard-and-fast a scientific spirit—so far as the selection of its practitioners is concerned—as any other

branch of human effort. Any boy who shows a taste for drawing can command the finest tuition in the world at an almost nominal price, and as he leaves the ranks of the mere 'prentice hands, a series of eliminatory processes which long use has rendered infallible weeds out the failures and classifies the successes. The pride of the great artists in their profession, their whole-hearted desire to continue the highest traditions of artistic culture, are truly splendid. Gérôme, old and sick, sits up in bed to examine and criticise the sketches of a boy he has never seen, and who is not even his compatriot. Meissonier, plunged in abysses of debt in spite of a princely professional income, yet finds time—and no small space of time either—to perform similar offices. 'The note of the race,' says Mr. Whiteing, 'is devotion to art. Art is almost the only real priesthood left in France. . . . It is regarded as a working substitute for religion.' That, of course, it can never quite be, but it is at least a better substitute for lost faith than land-grabbing and money-grubbing; the substitutes in which too many men of British race have put their trust. When one thinks of what French art means to the higher life of the world one can pardon, if not altogether endorse, the magnificent passage of rant in 'L'Année Terrible':—

Sans Paris, l'avenir naîtra reptil et nu.

It is rather a strange circumstance that, with the liking—and the capacity—for shedding new light upon familiar problems possessed by Mr. Whiteing, he

should have given us no theory by which we might be helped to understand what is, to many men of other races, the amazingly paradoxical view of woman taken by the average Frenchman. Centuries ago, an English traveller remarked that 'more than any other people do they despise, and flatter, their womenfolk,' a true statement, but one of which he afforded no explanation. Stranger still is the aspect in which the individual Frenchman views the sex. France is pre-eminently the home of the family sentiment. George Du Maurier's jingle,

> I sing tra la la!
> And I love my mamma!

expresses two predominant phases of French character. And the Frenchman's mamma is worth loving. Hear Mr. Whiteing in her praise:—

> The wives and womankind generally of the labouring class are a great force on the side of the domestic virtues. The well-brought-up Frenchwoman of whatever class is order, method, thrift, and industry personified. If a representative goddess of these virtues were wanted, there she is ready to hand. Within her degree she is, as I have said, neat from top to toe, well shod, trim in her attire. Within the same limit of opportunity she is notoriously a good cook. She will work early and late. Her children rise up and call her blessed as they put on the shirts and stockings which she has mended overnight. Strong drink is a vice almost unknown to her experience in so far as it is one affecting her own sex. So far as I know, there is no analogue in France to the British matron of the working-class who tipples at the public-house bar. It is an insistent fancy of mine that the Frenchwoman, both for good and ill, is the stronger of the sex combination for

the whole race. Like the person in the nursery rhyme, when she is bad she is horrid, because of the will and the mental power that she puts into her aberrations. But when she is good—and she is generally so (for in all life, thank Heaven! the averages are usually on the right side)—she is a treasure. She keeps the poor man's home straight.

Her daughter grows up like her, with the most elementary notions as to rights and pleasures, with the sternest notions as to duties. The home is, of course, the best nursery of these virtues, and I could wish that the girl had never to pass its bounds for the indiscriminate companionship of the factory. She has been taught to look for a sort of maternal initiative in all things, and she is apt to feel like a corporal's file without its corporal when she stands alone. She is not so well fortified as the English—above all, as the American—girl by pride in her self-reliance. She is best where she best likes to be—at home. After all, the best of factories is only the second-best of this ministrant sex, as the best of *crèches*, where one day, I suppose, the cradles will be rocked by steam-power, is only second-best for her baby brother or sister. Both are very much better than nothing; no more can be said. In France, as in England, the workman's ideal is to keep the woman at home. These in their sum are the great steadying influences that correct the boulevard and the wine-shop for the French working-man. They also correct the platforms of the revolution.

Every word of this is true, and every word of it is finding an echo at the moment I write in millions of French hearts. The one sentiment which brings down the house in a French theatre, a more certain hit even than 'l'Armée' or 'le drapeau' is the love of mother and son. The mere national coldness which marks such relations on our side of the Channel shocks even a depraved Frenchman, to whom nothing on earth is

sacred but 'la mère'—the wonderful mixture of playmate, chum, and tutelary goddess. At a Sunday night performance of 'Hamlet' at the Français, I have heard the packed mass of prolétaires and piou-pious in the pit groan with actual angry anguish at Hamlet's denunciation of Gertrude's wickedness. 'Elle a épousé l'assassin de son père, mais, voyons, c'est toujours sa mère, n'est-ce-pas?' How is it that this affection, so deep, so sincere, so exquisitely and beautifully tender, does so little to purify the average Frenchman's idea of woman as a sex? His notion would seem to be that his own mother is a saint and an angel, while yours, or mine, is most probably—something quite the reverse. And the worst of it for the national reputation is that the French literature of these latter days—the imaginative literature of the novelist and dramatist, dwells so persistently on the wrong half of this paradoxical summing up of the moral status of woman. In most French novels and plays there is a Nana or a Madame Marneffe, a Séraphine or a Marguerite Gautier; it is only far more rarely that the reader who knows his France only by the medium of the printed page can make the acquaintance of a Eugénie Grandet, a Pauline Quenu, or a Madame Hulot. When the few Frenchmen who read any language but their own, or are in the slightest degree aware of foreign criticism of their social life, complain—as they so frequently do—of the vulgar English idea that France is exclusively populated by people of worse than doubtful morals, they leave out of sight the obvious circumstance that a nation can

be judged, by the vast majority of the population of a foreign country, only by documentary evidence. And the documentary evidence from the pens of Frenchmen regarding their sisters' morals is frightfully damnatory. The false wife, the kept woman, and the cocotte, are the three dominant types of female character in the modern French novel and on the modern French stage; and that large, and—most unfortunately—increasing department of French 'literature' which, in Mr. Whiteing's phrase, 'might make us think the very Yahoos had learned to read,' intensifies a belief which every man who has personally studied French society knows to be a foul and cruel libel. 'Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin!'—though why Georges, passionately loving his mother, should so industriously blacken her sex is a curious and puzzling question. I have put this problem to more than one French friend, only to be answered by the evasive lift of the shoulder with which his nation dismisses a too thorny problem, and Mr. Meredith's advice, 'Never pursue a Frenchman beyond the shrug,' is one of the truest words ever written. Universally adopted by Englishmen, it might be the secret of a genuine and enduring 'entente cordiale' between the two nations.

We arrive here, by the simple and natural process of setting side by side the utterances of Thackeray and Tennyson on the one hand, and of Messrs. Whiteing and Macdonald on the other; at a curious and interesting little paradox, worthy, perhaps, of more than a mere passing glance. Thackeray and Tennyson were two

of the most remarkable personalities produced by the England of the nineteenth century. Neither Mr. Whiteing nor Mr. Macdonald possesses such genius as they could claim. Yet, in the gifts of understanding and sympathising with the thoughts and feelings of a race foreign to their own, which are surely among the powers with which one might expect a great novelist or a great poet to be most richly endowed —both these great geniuses could well afford to go to school to them. I can remember at this moment only two great imaginative English writers of the Victorian era whose utterances regarding France were unvarying in sympathy and kindliness—Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Dickens 'loved the French,' as he loved all men, and never spoke of them, as a nation, except with affection and admiration. Mrs. Browning saw in France 'the Christ of Nations,' and in the darkest hours of its history kept her eyes fixed on the goal towards which it struggled, rather than on the failures and humiliations with which its path was strewn so thickly. She could see the edifice which France toiled to build change, under some subtle and malign influence, from a Palace of Liberty to 'a brothel or a prison;' but her final word was one of hopeful prayer —'God save France!' Thackeray looked on at the socio-political turmoil with the true British grin of self-satisfied superiority; suggested that 'Boz, or Theodore Hook, would be a fitter historian for such a people and their revolutions than Thomas Carlyle;' and asked 'if anything was real in France'—if there was anything

to be found in the country but tinsel and humbug, frothy declamation and stage rant. The justification—if so it can be called—of Thackeray and Tennyson is that they spoke for the vast majority of their countrymen. Mr. Whiteing and Mr. Macdonald speak only for an infinitesimal minority, a minority so small that it can never have the least power permanently to affect the public mind.

Zola's Lay Sermon.

Fécondité, par Émile Zola.

Il aimait la vie, il en montrait l'effort incessant avec une tranquille vaillance, malgré tout le mal, tout l'écœurement qu'elle pouvait contenir. La vie avait beau paraître affreuse, elle devait être grande et bonne, puisqu'on mettait à la vivre une volonté si tenace, dans le but, sans doute, de cette volonté même et du grand travail ignoré qu'elle accomplissait. Certes, il était un savant, un clairvoyant, il ne croyait pas à une humanité d'idylle vivant dans une nature de lait, il voyait au contraire les maux et les tares, les étalait, les fouillait, les cataloguait depuis trente ans ; et sa passion de la vie, son admiration des forces de la vie suffisaient à le jeter dans une perpétuelle joie, d'où semblait couler naturellement son amour des autres, un attendrissement fraternel, une sympathie, qu'on sentait sous sa rudesse d'anatomiste et sous l'impersonnalité affectée de se udes.—Le Docteur Pascal, p. 57.

Certes, il y a bien des éléments pourris. Je ne les ai pas cachés, je les ai trop étalés peut-être. Mais vous ne m'entendez guère, si vous vous imaginez que je crois à l'effrondrement final, parce que je montre les plaies et les lézardes. Je crois à la vie qui élimine sans cesse les corps nuisibles, qui refait de la chair pour boucher les blessures, qui marche quand même à la santé, au renouvellement continu, parmi les impuretés et la mort.—Ibid., p. 106.

THE noblest spectacle and the highest lesson this mortal experience is capable of affording are surely the spectacle offered and the lesson inculcated by such lives as that of Émile Zola, a spectacle and a lesson whose value to humanity may be quite independent of the worth of any artistic product such lives may leave

behind them. For, merely regarding a man's work, there are always, and always must be, infinite discrepancies of opinion, and what, to one student, may be the very milk and meat of intellectual life will be to others a deadly poison, or a mere insipid mockery of honest food. This is especially the case with the effort of the innovator and the iconoclast, the bringer of new things, the militant thinker who conducts his campaign in some ancient domain of art or ethics, already the scene of a hundred hard-stricken battles. The last lesson the bulk of humanity will ever learn is that finality in anything is impossible, and most impossible of all in the realms of Art and Thought. A hundred systems have had their day and ceased to be, but the establishment of the last is always final in the belief of the generation which has grown under its influence — the merely approximate truth of its day is to it the eternal verity which shall witness the extinction of the stars. And so, the innovator is certain to have a hard time of it, and the lives of men of genius—who after all are merely men with the capacity of seeing the hitherto undiscovered relationships of common things—are so often what Carlyle declared them to be, lines in the saddest chapter of human history, not excluding the Newgate Calendar. There is that in the soul of man which will move him to give skin for skin, yea, life itself, for what he holds as truth, and that is the spirit which informs the nobler half of what we call Conservatism ; but there is that in the mind of man which bitterly resents, as a personal insult, all unfamiliar

teaching, and brands as a nuisance and a coxcomb the bringer of new things. 'Who the devil are you?' is the latter-day colloquial equivalent of the query hurled, generation after generation, at the innovator. 'Who made you our judge and our instructor?' And there is, of course, the chance, and more than a mere off-chance, that the conservative may be right and the innovator wrong. All apostles of new science are not Keplers, all philanthropic reformers are not Clarksons, all artistic revolutionaries are not Balzacs or Zolas. Where the world is most cruel is not in the denial of the value of a proffered gift, but in its failure to read the spirit in which the gift is laid before it; in the non-recognition of the generosity and courage without which the gift, whatever be its worth or worthlessness, would never have been proffered at all.

> Not on the vulgar mass
> Called 'work,' must sentence pass—
> Things done, which took the eye and had their price;
> O'er which from level stand
> The low world laid its hand,
> Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice.

Sweat of blood must many a time have gone to the doing of work whose contemplation left no human soul the richer or the poorer by one grain—or even to the making of nothing at all. One of the profoundest of all human truths is that put by Browning into the mouth of Rabbi Ben Ezra:—

> Thoughts, hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,

Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;
All, I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
That I was worth to God—

But, after all, the wise man will do his best to be content with such rough and partial justice as the world—rather busy than brutal, rather indifferent than inimical—can find time to mete out. He will turn with especial gladness to the life-records of those individuals of dominant power, whose thrones are set enduringly upon the Alps of difficulty conquered by resolute endeavour ; and will be less eager to criticise the laws they fulminate than to recognise the splendid courage and endurance by dint whereof they won their right to a hearing. What, to-day, is the value of the camel-load of ponderous polemics on which Samuel Johnson relied as a passport to immortality ? But when, so long as the history of his life remains, shall it fail to be a cordial draught to all who read it, in its record of long years of obscurity, privation, and physical and mental anguish so bravely borne, of ignoble mill-work so nobly done, of sordid difficulty so splendidly overcome; all to be crowned at last by the pathetic irony of a brief term of honour and success, coming when he was old and could not enjoy them, solitary, and could not share them?

In one important respect, Émile Zola has been more fortunate than most pioneers of literary revolution. Still in the full vigour of production, he has been a recognised leader of European thought for something

like a quarter of a century; so it can hardly be said of him, as must be said of so many of his brother innovators, that 'strength has been mournfully denied its arena.' He had his early years of poverty and obscurity, bitter enough, and he had for some time very considerable difficulty in finding a rostrum from which to preach his artistic doctrine; but the years of his apprenticeship were rather helpful than hindering to his genius. They taught him many of the sterner facts of life, and developed and strengthened the philosophical scheme he has made it the business of his intellectual maturity to teach to his generation. A struggle less bitter, crowned by an earlier success, might have been even injurious to his higher interests, by curtailing his experience of the seamy side of life. To describe him as a point-blank pessimist, or as a man whose mental senses are so curiously adjusted that he is conscious only of the shadows and stenches of existence, is an exhibition of sheer critical stupidity, all the more exasperating from its frequent repetition. Not that that kind of critical ineptitude has ever mattered much to him. No burly mariner, pacing the deck in panoply of oilskin and sou'wester, could be more placidly contemptuous of a passing shower than Zola has been of the torrents of abuse poured on him by his critical opponents. Nothing is more remarkable, nothing more admirable, in his half-dozen bulky volumes of polemics, from 'Mes Haines' to 'La Nouvelle Campagne,' than the good temper and sweet reasonableness of their tone. The best-insulted man

in Europe, his only weapons of reprisal were logic and irony—the last generally quite free from any taint of personal bitterness. I know no critical utterances, either analytic or synthetic, to be compared with his for clarity of idea and directness of expression, for the strange blending of red-heat of belief with studious sobriety of language. They are eloquent of that settled calm of conviction out of which alone great work can ever come, the conviction that the message they convey is one of vital and necessary truth, the conviction that has no need to express itself in rant and froth; but, 'strong without rage, without o'erflowing full,' moves with the mild but indivertible force of a great river.

Dominant natures are, as a rule, homogeneous; the outcome of a strongly marked personality is generally of a piece. It was characteristic of the man who undertook the gigantic task of reforming the opinion of the entire world that he should cast his effort in a mould as gigantic as the thought which inspired it. Starving and obscure, it never apparently occurred to Zola to put forth his ideas in scattered and disconnected volumes, each self-dependent, and each therefore with a fair chance of being readily converted into the necessaries of life. He did indeed write such books, but they were merely *hors d'œuvres*, and their principal value to their author was that they helped him to live while arranging the plan and building the base of that Babylonian literary edifice, 'Les Rougon-Macquart.' It was characteristic, yet again, that when the unfaltering courage and splendid level strength of temperament and genius

of which that amazing series of volumes is the monument had won for its author wealth, power, and the reluctant respect of his bitterest opponents, he should fling all he had gained into the balance in the cause of justice, and dare ruin for the sake of a wronged man whose face he had never seen. It was characteristic that, prosecuted, exiled, in danger of his very life, he should calmly continue the manufacture of his daily tale of 'copy.' It is characteristic that, the desperate battle fought and won, at an age when most men begin to ask of life some brief period of ease and rest, he should settle with the same familiar sturdy quiet to the writing of a last great message to his generation and his race, the Four Gospels of Fecundity, Labour, Justice, and Truth. Challengeable as a thinker, by no means impeccable as an artist, but supreme as a Man, he stands amid the group of splendid figures the nineteenth century has added to the interminable frieze of history, the unquestioned peer of the noblest and the best.

The main thread of the narrative of 'Fécondité' is extremely simple, and its 'moral' as obvious as that of a Biblical parable. Mathieu Froment, a young man in the early twenties, has married a penniless girl, Marianne, a distant cousin of his employer, Alexandre Beauchêne, the inheritor and head of an important manufactory of agricultural implements. The young couple, at the date at which the story opens, have already four children,

and are in expectation of a fifth. Mathieu's actual salary and future prospects are both of the most modest, and his wild improvidence in thus handicapping himself at the very start of the race of life is a theme of much contemptuous pleasantry on the part of his cousin and employer, Beauchêne, and of his landlord, Séguin. Beauchêne and Séguin are both types of capital importance. Beauchêne has one child, a son, upon whom both he and his wife have founded their entire hope. He is to be the future king of commerce, to inherit and aggrandise the wealth and position of his parents, neither of whom could conceive a more harrowing disaster than the coming of a second child to split his inheritance. Séguin is a nervous, spineless dilettante, a fribble, a coward, and an egotist, incessantly wailing over the inherent vulgarity of existence; finding his only consolation in some far-off epoch when humanity, recognising the ugliness and sterility of life, shall cease to breed, and leave the earth a mere wilderness of vegetation, peopled by brutes. He is the proprietor of Chantebled, a vast and sterile waste of stone, sand, and water; which produces nothing but thorns, nettles, and a few partridges. Mathieu, dwelling amid this desert in a ruinous old shooting-box, grows himself a little disquieted by the rapid increase of his family, and casts about in his mind for some means of improving his children's prospects. He conceives the idea of buying a corner of the neglected domain, clearing it, and trying his luck as a wheat farmer. The experiment,

begun on the most modest scale, succeeds, and year by year Mathieu extends his labours, adding acre to acre; that fruitful vine, his wife, increasing their family once in every two years, with the regularity of a well-mounted automaton. Meanwhile, Beauchêne and Séguin are walking their respective roads. The first, a man of gross nature, determined to limit his legitimate off-spring to the one adored child he already possesses, satisfies his sensual appetites elsewhere than at home, and wastes his time, his health, and his fortune in a series of more and more disgraceful liaisons. His cherished son dies, a year or two of renewed cohabitation with his wife make it plain that they can hope for no other offspring to replace him; he goes back to his vagabond amours, and sinks into the mud of shameless promiscuity, leaving his business to fall year by year into the hands of a son of Mathieu, who has succeeded his father as head-draughtsman at the factory, and finally dying, old, despised, ruined, and alone. Séguin, dishonoured in the person of his wife, an originally honest woman, whose better nature has dry-rotted under the influence of his morbid and cowardly pessimism, wastes the price of his estate in all kinds of stupid fantasies. His daughter, her young life blighted by the knowledge of her mother's infidelity, buries herself in a convent; his son becomes an anchorite-soldier, 'with no wife but his sword.' The once wealthy and prosperous family disappears like a river that runs into the sand. Mathieu and his swarming progeny triumph all along the line.

Chantebled, the desert which their robust courage has made to blossom as the rose, is theirs. The great factory, drawing wealth from every corner of the earth, is theirs. 'Grace à la famille nombreuse, à la poussée fatale du nombre, ils avaient fini par tout envahir, par tout posséder. La fécondité était la souveraine, l'invincible conquérante. . . . Et ils étaient, la main dans la main, devant leur œuvre, tels que d'admirables héros, glorieux d'avoir été bons et forts, d'avoir beaucoup enfanté, beaucoup créé, donné au monde beaucoup de joie, de santé, d'espoir, parmi les éternelles luttes et les éternelles larmes.' A grandfather at forty, a great-grandfather at sixty, a great-great-grandfather at eighty, we take farewell of Mathieu at ninety amid the clamorous worship of his two hundred descendants, standing beside the faithful partner of his seventy years of fruitful labour, under the shadow of a giant oak he had planted as a sapling on the day when his spade turned the first sod of Chantebled. There is an unexpected guest amid the crowd in the person of his grandson Dominique, the son of Nicolas, a pioneer of the Soudan, himself the father of a flourishing family, looking hopefully forward to the day when his children shall have repeated in Africa the miracle the founder of their race has accomplished in France, the metamorphosis of a desert into a garden. 'Pardessus les mers, le lait avait coulé du vieux sol de France, jusqu'aux immensités de l'Afrique vierge, la jeune et géante France de demain. Après le Chantebled

conquis sur un coin dédaigné du patrimoine national, un autre Chantebled se taillait un royaume, au loin, dans les vastes étendues désertes, que la vie avait à féconder encore. Et c'était l'exode, l'expansion humaine par le monde, l'humanité en marche, à l'infini.'

In the hands of most writers of fiction, perhaps of any living writer but Zola, this strong and simple theme would of itself have sufficed for the making of a novel of full average length. But as is his habit in preaching those tremendous 'lay-sermons' by which he has won his fame, he enforces his moral by the action of a vast number of subsidiary types. His theme in 'Fécondité' is the decadence of France as a European power by the rapid failure of her population, that France is dying for lack of Frenchmen. To the purely philosophical mind that fact might present itself as one of merely local interest —there is certainly little enough fear of humanity perishing for lack of men. But Zola is a philosopher plus a Frenchman, and an ultra-chauvinistic Frenchman at that, which means that, in matters relating to the motherland, he ceases to be a philosopher at all, or at least ceases to be a philosopher of the dispassionate school. To him, the slow suicide of France is a terrible and atrocious thing; the petty selfishness of the individual who shirks the national responsibility of nurturing the children who should be the labourers and soldiers of to-morrow the vilest of crimes; 'fece per viltate, il gran rifiuto,' the most shameful of national epitaphs.

Mathieu, the apostle of Fecundity, finds himself, by

the hazards of life, plunged into the intimacy of a set of people whose principal pre-occupations are the indulgence of the sexual passion and the suppression of the natural results of its exercise. His fellow employé, Morange, is a married man with one child, a daughter. His wife, a beautiful, ambitious, and by no means unamiable woman, has concentrated the social ambitions she can never hope personally to realise on the head of little Reine. She and Morange pinch and starve and contrive with the one object of accumulating for her a dowry which will ensure her a husband of a higher class than their own. The efforts of years of ambitious self-sacrifice are suddenly blasted by the threatened appearance of a second child. The foolish couple, good people both, with no worse quality than a vicarious ambition in their simple hearts, fly in their despair to Madame Rouche, a discreet person whose amiable office it is to render aid in such cases. An illicit operation results in the poor woman's death; a year or two later Reine reaches the same sad bourne by a similar path, and Morange is left to solitude, madness, and ultimate suicide. Beauchêne, Mathieu's cousin and employer, has a liaison with a workgirl in his own factory. Very unwillingly, the sensual egotist consents to support the girl until the birth of her child, which passes through the hands of l'Assistance Publique into the care of La Couteau, an awful creature whose business is baby-murder, and who lives in the village of Rougemont amid a population of monsters in her own likeness. Mathieu's nearest neighbours in the country are a

young couple named Angelin, passionately fond of each other, but resolute to have no children to disturb the idyllic atmosphere of their lives. When at last they wake to the desire of offspring, it is too late, and Madame Angelin finds the best outlet she may for her baffled maternal instinct in relieving the miseries of the children of the poorest and most criminal quarters of Paris. She is murdered for the sake of her bag of small change by Alexandre, Beauchêne's illegitimate child, who has escaped the infantine holocaust of Rougemont to develop into a bandit and assassin. 'Au hasard d'une minute de luxure, la sémence humaine avait jailli, l'enfant avait poussé sans qu'on y songeât, né au petit bonheur, laché ensuite sur le trottoir, sans surveillance, sans soutien. Il s'y pourrissait, il y devenait un terrible ferment de décomposition sociale . . . . faisant le fumier où germait le crime.' Beauchêne's sister, the Baroness Serafine, is a Society Messalina, a high-class Nana. In order to indulge her one appetite she undergoes, at the hands of the famous surgeon, Gaude, an operation which, if Zola is to be trusted—and Zola, on matters of fact, may be trusted blindfold—is growing appallingly fashionable among all classes of French life. Gaude's practice is enormous; his hospital patients number two and three thousands per annum, his private patients reach twice those numbers. It is reckoned that in fifteen years, in Paris alone, from thirty to forty thousands of such operations have taken place, and that in the whole of France half a million of women have passed under the bistouri of

Gaude and his fellow practitioners. 'En dix ans, le couteau des châtreurs de femmes nous a fait plus de mal que les balles prussiennes pendant l'année terrible.' In the case of Serafine, a highly-strung, ill-balanced woman, already the victim of an unhealthy nevrose, the result of the operation is a shock to the entire system which induces an appallingly rapid physical and mental degeneration, culminating in insanity.

The student of Zola's former work may guess with what a ruthless hand this indictment of contemporary France is drawn, with what completeness and amplitude of knowledge the sordid details of this terrible series of pictures of moral degradation and physical misery are filled in. The result on the mind of the reader of many passages of 'Fécondité' is truly appalling. They chill the blood and grip the heart as no wealth of merely invented horrors could do, it is their absolute and unescapable sense of truth and reality which gives them their terrible effect. And, such is the perfection of Zola's art, it is not those scenes of misery which he makes pass actually before the eyes of the reader which create the most dreadful impression, or which dwell most persistently on the mind. It is that horrible village-metropolis of infanticide, Rougemont, which he never sees at all, which to him is personified in the figure of La Couteau, 'meneuse de nourrices' and baby-farmer, who comes and goes every fortnight between Rougemont and Paris; bringing with her on every visit a handful of female harpies to devastate the nurseries of Paris, and returning to her

lair, like some hideous ogress, laden with children, of whom we know that ninety per cent. are doomed to a death of miserable squalor: a licensed assassin, a chartered pestilence in petticoats.

But if, in this amazing study of contemporary life, the shadows are painted with a heavy hand, there are spots of brightness too, broad patches of clear colour. In Norine Moineaud, Beauchêne's abandoned mistress, Zola has added yet another to the portrait gallery of feminine figures of which little Jeanne, of 'Une Page d'Amour,' and Pauline, of 'La Joie de Vivre,' are among the most delightful examples. There is little enough either of the saint or the heroine about poor Norine when we first make her acquaintance, and for a long time after. She is just the typical child of her class, the Parisian gamine, with the added accident of physical beauty, hungry for coarse pleasures and cheap bedizenment. When Beauchêne's child is born she parts with it with hardly a pang, though she knows to what fate it is in all likelihood condemned. The father whose roof she has disgraced has set his face implacably against her; her one refuge and possible profession is the boulevard, and she takes to the 'vie du trottoir' quite naturally, like a duck to water; living through its alternations of hunger and repletion, cheap splendour and squalid misery, with the careless, stupid courage of the class to whose level she has sunk. A second child comes to her, and would go the way of the first, but for the simple cunning of Mathieu, who, with a super-Machiavellian wealth of diplomatic manœuvring,

manages to persuade her to suckle it. And lo! in the heart of this poor, battered Aspasia of the streets the divine flame of motherhood is kindled by the mere touch of the baby-lips upon her breast; the foulness of the old life falls from her like a discarded garment. In the very prime of her vulgar beauty she turns her back upon its market, and devotes herself to a life of monotonous and wretchedly-paid labour that her child may have an honest woman for his mother. She has a sister, Cécile, who at the age of sixteen has passed under the hands of the Surgeon Gaude, and whose life is one long despair, because she was born for motherhood, and now can never know either its joys or pains. Norine and Cécile, the repentant Magdalen and the maiden doomed to perpetual sterility, come together over the cradle of the child of shame. They earn a few sous a day by making card-board boxes, and the little one has two mothers, 'Maman Norine' and 'Maman Cécile,' who so emulate each other in coddling and spoiling him that he neither knows nor cares to ask which is indeed his mother in the flesh. In this and in similar incidents which so beautifully diversify the else abiding terror of this wonderful book there is no note of that cheap and shabby sentimentality by which even so great a writer as Charles Dickens sometimes reduced pathos to nauseous ineptitude. Norine and Cécile do not become wingless angels, nor does their adored bantling develop a vocabulary reconciling the verbiage of Dr. Johnson with the philosophy of Mr. Martin Tupper. They remain poor, common people, with the outlook and the

locutions of their kind; a trio of Parisian cockneys, vulgar among the vulgar in dress and speech and aspect, differentiated only from the crowd about them by the pathos of their story, the divine gentleness and strength of their mutual affection. Zola accepts and proclaims life as it is with a kind of splendid shamelessness. It is that very quality which makes his strength. Naked humanity, stripped of the tinselled trappings in which long generations of sentimental liars have bedecked it, is enough for him. It will seem strange, perhaps strangest of all to those who have most closely studied his work, that he, of all men, should preach the doctrine of fecundity, who, of all men, has most pitilessly dwelt upon the miseries and horrors of human existence. But the apparent paradox vanishes before a little thought; this book, this tremendous and triumphant sermon on the text, 'Increase and multiply,' is a flood of vivid light upon the true inwardness of Zola's creed. Life is terrible, awful, tragic beyond all power of words to speak; but it is the Law, the outcome of the immutable and eternal not-ourselves, the Foundation and Principle, the force before which the unending generations of our race are but as dust before the wind. All questioning of its end or object are vanity; love it or hate it as you will, you cannot escape its laws. And, if it has its terrors and squalors, it has too its beauties, its fleeting moments of divine insight, its brief glimpses of a diviner hope beyond itself.

Such is the theme, and such the lesson, of this remarkable book; the largest in bulk, and assuredly not

the least admirable in literary quality, in grasp of fact, in knowledge of life, among the two score of masterly volumes we owe to the indefatigable genius of Émile Zola. It would be impossible, in many times the space at my command, to do justice to its virtues. Like all that has proceeded from the pen of its great author, it is written with a calm and level strength, an unfailing dexterity of artistic execution. Probably no living writer but Zola could have conceived a theme at once so large and so simple; perhaps no other writer, having conceived it, would have had the audacity to attempt to realise the conception: quite certainly there is no verbal artist working in Europe to-day who could have carried so tremendous an undertaking to so triumphant a close. The action of the book covers seventy years, at every turn of its story new figures appear upon the scene, new interests are evolved, new fields of knowledge and observation are opened. It has a largeness, a fulness, an abundance, like those of life itself. Laughter and tears and terror, joy and despair and indignation and pity, jostle each other in its pages as in the infinite phantasmagoria of existence. No book I have ever read has revived so acutely in my mind the eternal questions of the limits and the aims of the artist in fiction; the problem of how far a novelist, who writes for all the world, is justified in reproducing the actualities of life. It contains passages over which the strongest critical stomachs might sicken; episodes which evoke irrepressible shudders of repulsion, and, torn from their context, would seem to be the work of some fiendish

satyr, some enemy of his kind moved by the horrible ambition of de Sade, 'to leave the world a little worse than he had found it.' And yet, the book closed, the work left to speak in its entirety, those passages and episodes which, at the moment of reading, seem burned into the brain as by the action of a mordant acid, are forgotten, effaced, are at most but like a discordant murmur troubling the exultant lilt of a song of joy and triumph. It is long since Zola's unswerving truth to the baser depths of human nature has ceased to evoke the foolish cry of 'pornograph' and 'filth-lover' from even the most stupid. It was amazing to any person of intelligence that the cry should ever have been raised at all, for he has never written a book which was not instinct with the beauty of love and pity; never painted a corner of the human Inferno without at least its one angelic figure, testifying against its sordid background like the lily in the mouth of Tartarus. 'J'ai fait œuvre de justice et de vérité,' was his reply to his accusers, and the world had learned to believe him even before that day when he stood over the figure of Dreyfus like Voltaire above Jean Calas, and flung his hard-earned fortune and popularity into the scale of justice. We of his own generation stand too near to see the full human value of that act of splendid audacity, but even to us it is as a light whereby we may judge of Zola as a man, an episode which illuminates and justifies his life and work. We may be told that in 'Fécondité,' as in his former books, he has introduced matter which cannot, of its nature, be used as material for a work of

art; and that a book built of such matter must be necessarily a hybrid, an unclassable literary eccentricity. It may be so, but I can only remember that the same thing has been said of nearly every former work of Zola's, and that he has never yet written a book which has not moved me to a passionate admiration, nor of which the ultimate outcome has not been a larger understanding, a tenderer pity, of the struggling and suffering mass of which I am a unit. I do not know whether 'Fécondité' is bad art, or good art, or a negation of all art. I know only that for a few hours I have laughed and lamented, suffered, triumphed, and despaired with the shadows who people its pages; and that, since I happen to be called upon to speak my word respecting it, I am glad and proud of the privilege of publicly thanking a man of lofty genius for a great and living book.

A Lyric Love.

[The Browning Letters.]

O, lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire !

OF all the Love-stories ever told or sung, or ever acted in the mimic world of the stage, or in tragic or happy reality, surely none is more strange, more remarkable, more infinitely beautiful than that of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. A middle-aged woman, who has never been physically attractive, and who has been worn by years of sickness and soul-solitude to a mere shadow of the self she should have been, lies awaiting with a serene patience and placid courage the hour of her release. The bitterness of death has long since passed, for in her simple faith it can rob her of nothing that she cares to keep, and her answer to his final summons will place her again beside the mother and the brother whose loss was only the greatest calamity of a pathetically unhappy experience. Love—never more than the dimmest of dreams to her, has ceased to be even a dream—if all the men in the world could pass in procession by her sofa which one of them all would choose her ? Fame, she has won—

if it be 'fame' to read her name in the literary reviews and to receive scattered letters which tell her that, out of the twelve hundred million hearts beating on the earth's surface, she has, for a moment, fluttered a score by a graceful fancy or a sigh eloquent of pain. She has a father, whom she loves, and who—as she thinks—loves her; and brothers and sisters, and books, and dreams, and her life ebbs slowly like a sluggish river already arrived within hearing of the ocean which waits to absorb it. The world has narrowed to the limits of her chamber; humanity is represented by her family circle and by plump, cheery, sensible John Kenyon, who loved her, and will share her immortality because she loved him in return. And suddenly, with a suddenness no epithet or simile can describe, the narrow chamber is changed to a royal reception-room, the sick-bed to a throne, the poor crippled woman to a Queen—the Queen of but one subject, true—but what a subject!

The most fervent lover of either or both of the great poets who penned these letters could only rise from their perusal with increased admiration and greater affection for their writers. So far from there being any line which one could wish to blot, there are few lines in the entire eleven hundred pages of these 'Letters' of which the destruction or suppression would not have been a loss to humanity at large. We have been told, *ad nauseam*, that they 'were not meant for publication.' At the moment of writing they were not so meant, and it is precisely that

circumstance which gives them their greatest beauty and significance. Compare them with the letters of other celebrities—of Byron, for instance, who never wrote the most casual line without a shadowy printer's devil at his elbow. But when, towards the close of his life, Browning gave the letters to his son with the simple injunction, 'do with them as you please,' his desire for their publication was evident; and what more testimony to its advisability is needed? More than fifty years have passed since they were written. Both the hearts whose passionate beats they chronicle are still in death. There is no more 'indelicacy' or lack of reverence, now, in giving these letters to the world, full as they are of the writer's once most jealously hidden thoughts, fancies, and aspirations, than if the hands which wrote them had been dust

> To the last digit, ages ere our birth.

This aspect of the case, curiously enough, is discussed, and—to my thinking—finally disposed of, in a letter of Mrs. Browning's, printed in the first volume of this collection.

> I, for my part, value letters as the most vital part of biography, and for any rational human being to put his foot on the traditions of his kind in this particular class, does seem to me as wonderful as possible. . . . I can read book after book of such reading—or could. And if her (Miss Martineau's) principle were carried out there would be an end! Death would be deader from henceforth. Also it is a wrong selfish principle and unworthy of her whole life and profession, because we should all be ready to say that if the secrets of our

daily lives and inner souls may instruct other surviving souls, let them be open to men hereafter, even as they are to God now. Dust to dust, and soul-secrets to humanity—there are natural heirs to all these things. Not that I do not intimately understand the shrinking back from the idea of publicity on any terms—not that I would not myself destroy papers of mine which were sacred to me for personal reasons—but then I never would call this natural weakness virtue—nor would I, as a teacher of the public, announce it and attempt to justify it as an example to other minds and acts, I hope.

Look what is inside of this letter—look! I gathered it for you to-day when I was walking in the Regent's Park. Are you surprised? Arabel and Flush and I were in the carriage—and the sun was shining with that green light through the trees, as if he carried down with him the very essence of the leaves to the ground . . . and I wished so much to walk through a half-open gate along a shaded path, that we stopped the carriage and got out and walked, and I put both my feet on the grass . . . which was the strangest feeling! . . . and gathered this laburnum for you. It hung quite high up on the tree, the little blossom did, and Arabel said that certainly I could not reach it—but you see!

It is not a child of seven who writes this, but a woman of thirty-seven, and a woman, moreover, whose name comes to the lips of all who number the great poets of England.

It was like a bit of that Dreamland which is your especial dominion—and I felt joyful enough for the moment to look round for you, as for the cause. It seemed illogical not to see you close by. And you were not far off, after all, if thoughts count as bringers near. Dearest, we shall walk together under the trees some day!

'That Dreamland which is your especial dominion.' What a world of pathos is in that little phrase, read in the light shed upon it by a full knowledge of Elizabeth Barrett's life! The main features of that life are familiar to every student of her work. They form a story which, like all other stories, however wonderful, or tragic, or comic, or pitiful, has grown commonplace and uninteresting merely by force of being so well known. It is the overmastering charm and beauty of this book that it vivifies the dull and faded picture we all know so well; that in place of a pale, faded daguerreotype of a young lady lying on a cushioned sofa, reading Greek, writing verses, and fondling a lapdog, it gives us the living, breathing reproduction, by her own hand, of the heart and soul of one who was at once a great poet and a most noble human creature. The poems, both of Mrs. Browning and of her husband, are full of the spirit of love, much of the finest work of each is that which deals with individual passion; but nothing in the utterances they addressed to the ear of the world compares in force, in beauty, in true sacredness, with the story of their love for each other, as it is revealed in these letters.

Do you remember that incident in Thackeray of one of a party of visitors to Bicêtre giving a poor epileptic creature in the hospital 'a cornet, or "screw" of snuff,' and of the awful, unendurable transport of affection and gratitude the gift provoked from its recipient? The earlier letters of Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning give me some such tightness of the

throat and compression of the heart as that spectacle produced in Thackeray. She seems in danger of withering in the sudden glory that has shone about her, like that mortal maiden to whom, in the Greek legend, Zeus revealed himself. When the first bewildering shock has passed, she can speak of nothing but her own unworthiness.

> What could I speak that would not be unjust to you? Your life! if you gave it to me and I put my whole heart into it; what should I put but anxiety, and more sadness than you were born to? What could I give you which it would not be ungenerous to give?

This thought grew to be a positive obsession, and more than one of her letters to Browning is, in effect, as solemn an appeal to him to leave and forget her, as is expressed in the fifth of the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese.'

> I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
> As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
> And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
> The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
> What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
> And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
> Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn
> Could tread them out to darkness utterly
> It might be well perhaps. But if instead
> Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
> The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
> O my beloved, will not shield thee so,
> That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
> The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.'

This note recurs constantly, even after she had learned to accept the at first unbelievable miracle as a solid and abiding reality:—

Why did you love me, my beloved, when you might have chosen from the most perfect of all women, and each would have loved you with the perfectest of her nature? That is my riddle in this world. I can understand everything else—I was never stopped for the meaning of sorrow upon sorrow . . . but that you should love me I do not understand, and I think that I never shall.

And again:—

I had done living, I thought, when you came and sought me out! and why, and to what end? . . . . Perhaps just that I might pray for you—which were a sufficient end. . . . . It is something to me between dream and miracle, all of it—as if some dream of my earliest, brightest dreaming-time had been lying through these dark years to steep in the sunshine, returning to me in a double light. Can it be, I say to myself, that you feel for me so? can it be meant for me? . . . . Your love has been to me like God's own love, which makes the receivers of it kneelers.

Here, again, is a most characteristic passage, full of subtler meanings than those—pathetic enough as they are—which lie open upon its surface.

What you say of society draws me on to many comparative thoughts of your life and mine. You seem to have drunken of the cup of life full, with the sun shining on it. I have lived only inwardly, or with sorrow for a strong emotion. Before this seclusion of my illness, I was secluded still, and there are few of the youngest women in the world who have not seen more, heard more, known more, of society, than I, who am scarcely to be called young now. I grew up in the country,

had no social opportunities, had my heart in books and poetry, and my experience in reveries. . . . And so time passed and passed, and afterwards when my illness came and I seemed to stand at the edge of the world with all done, and no prospect (as appeared at one time) of ever passing the threshold of one room again ; why then, I turned to thinking with some bitterness (after the greatest sorrow of my life had given me time and room to breathe) that I had stood blind in this temple I was about to leave—that I had seen no Human nature, that my brothers and sisters of the earth were 'names' to me, that I had beheld no great mountain or river ; nothing, in fact. I was as a man dying who had not read Shakespeare, and it was too late ! do you understand ? And do you also know what a disadvantage this ignorance is to my art ? Why, if I live on and yet do not escape from this seclusion, do you not perceive that I labour under signal disadvantages—that I am, in a manner, as a blind poet.

There is a truly painful significance in those words—'I was as a man dying who had not read Shakespeare'—they mean so much. They mean that Elizabeth Barrett was so far removed from the human sympathies and human activities which filled the lives of happier women that she could not even draw from such sympathies and activities a symbol for her loneliness and impotence, but must needs take one from the only world she knew, that of books and thought.

> I lived with shadows for my company
> Instead of men and women.

To the last day of her life, she felt and mourned the thinness of her actual active experience, and in her earlier poems the grief, the sense of loss, the 'aching

void' it occasioned, find frequent place. There is a tear, as well as a smile, in the quaint exordium to 'Hector in the Garden':—

> Nine years old! The first of any
> Seem the happiest years that come:
> Yet when I was nine, I said
> No such word! I thought instead
> That the Greeks had used as many
> In besieging Ilium.

'If my poetry is worth anything in any eye,' she wrote to Browning in one of her earliest letters, 'it is the flower of me. I have lived most and been most happy in it, and so it has all my colours; the rest of me is but a root, fit for the ground and the dark.'

She had no need of the constant reminders of the critics of her later books of the artistic debt she owed to her husband. In the 'Sonnets' she told him—

> What I do,
> And what I dream, include thee, as the wine
> Must taste of its own grapes.

And her letters are full of similar confessions—or proclamations, as she would have preferred to call them. 'Whatever faculty I have is included in your faculty, and with a great rim all round it besides!'

That, in return for this soul-filling affection, Browning truly and passionately loved his wife, is proved by the mere fact of his having chosen her out of 'the world of women' in which, as she truly said, he might have sought a helpmeet. If—as could hardly

fail to be the case—he was conscious of his superiority to her, both as a thinker and a poet, neither that knowledge nor her almost idolatrous proclamation of his ascendancy had the least power to diminish the loving reverence he felt for her. His letters are full of eloquent recognition of the purity, sweetness, and high moral dignity which marked her character. It seems as if, at moments, he found it as great a marvel that such a woman should love him as she found it that he should love her. 'How you rise above yourself, while I get no nearer where you were first of all!' he writes to her after weeks of intimate correspondence. 'But so it should be! So may it be ever!' They met in an encounter of gorgeous compliment, like a giant and a fairy, each admiring and coveting in the other some special gift of strength or grace. 'Oh, my love,' he writes to her,

> Why, what is it you think to do, or become 'afterward,' that you may fail in and so disappoint me? . . . . For, sweet, why wish, why think to alter ever by a line, change by a shade, turn better if that were possible, and so only rise the higher above me, yet further from instead of nearer to my heart? What I expect, what I build my future on, am quite, quite prepared to 'risk' everything for—is that one belief that you will not alter, will just remain as you are—meaning by you, the love in you, the qualities I have known (for you will stop me if I do not stop myself) that I have evidence of in every letter, in every word, every look. Keeping these, if it be God's will that the body passes—what is that? Write no new letters, speak no new words, look no new looks—only tell me, years hence, that the present is alive, that what was once, still is—and I am, must needs be, blessed as ever! You speak of

my feeling as if it were a pure speculation—as if, because I see somewhat in you, I make a calculation that there must be more to see somewhere or other — where bdellium is found, the onyx-stone may be looked for in the mystic land of the four rivers! And perhaps . . . . oh, poor human nature!—perhaps I do think at times on what may be to find! But what is that to you? I offer for the bdellium—the other may be found or not found. . . . What I see glitter on the ground, that will suffice to make me rich as—rich as—

It must for ever remain a moot point whether—merely as a thinker or as a verbal artist—Elizabeth Barrett gained or lost by her long and intimate association with Robert Browning. Merely as a woman, merely as a human creature, it is beyond doubt that she gained enormously. It is no exaggeration or misstatement to say that the last fifteen years of her mortal life were a wedding gift made to her by her husband. His ardent love, his reverent admiration, the interest and meaning he imported into her hitherto cramped and colourless existence, were to her as a potent wine, as a transfusion of red blood. But for Browning his wife would never have written 'Aurora Leigh,' or 'Casa Guidi Windows'—she would not have lived to write them. But, that indubitable and else all-important fact once gratefully recognised, it must be allowed that his artistic influence was not an unmitigated good. What she wrote of his faculty 'including' hers was true. If she was the greatest woman poet the world has seen, he was the greatest English poet since Shakespeare. And she had in excess the feminine vice of imitativeness, as she herself confessed in one of her letters. 'You

are "masculine" to the height—and I, as a woman, have studied some of your gestures of language and intonation wistfully, as a thing beyond me far! and the more admirable for being beyond.' She had fallen under his artistic influence long before she had ever seen his face, and her letters are full of hinted and inferred quotations from his earlier poems — phrases, words, gleams of thought and idea, which showed that 'Pippa Passes' and 'Paracelsus' had been read and re-read, pondered over, assimilated so completely that they had passed into the very blood and tissue of her mind. Imitation of anybody, however great, is an artistic vice, but imitation of such writers as Browning and Carlyle, writers whose fervency of thought and vigour of expression make their very defects pass for virtues, is disastrous. Mrs. Browning confessed to a constitutional carelessness of mere form, and to something like a contempt of that sculpturesque 'finish' which has—most happily to my thinking—been among the most strenuously sought objects of most of the great English poets; and that carelessness and that contempt were marked characteristics of her chosen model. Personally, I am no adherent of the 'praise-at-any-price' school of criticism, and all my admiration of Browning and Mrs. Browning will never reconcile me to the verbal form in which they were content to clothe some of their noblest thought. Royal ideas should be royally dressed. I can recognise the intellectual Ulysses under the rags of a scarecrow, but I prefer to see him in his befitting garniture of robe and crown. Cacophanous

concatenation of amazing adjective, staggering scansion, and tympanum-torturing tintinnabulation of recalcitrant rhyme are as easy, if one lays oneself out to excel in them, as apt alliteration, and a good deal less pleasing. And I believe, also, that both of these great poets unawares exemplified the artistic doctrine they denied. The writings of both are thickly scarred with faults of form and expression, but their best work, that which reveals the highest and purest thought, and by which they will be ultimately judged and finally classified among the poets of the world, is also that in which their mere mannerisms and wilful eccentricities are least remarkable.

Miss Marie Corelli.

THE MASTER-CHRISTIAN. By Marie Corelli.

UPON what precise plane of artistic achievement, in relation to Miss Marie Corelli's other books, 'The Master-Christian' should be placed, is a question which I must leave to critics with a wider knowledge of her work than I can boast. Except for a perfunctory skimming of the pages of 'The Sorrows of Satan' and 'Barabbas' at the moments of their publication, I know no more of her literary achievement than I have learned by hearing her books discussed in general society, or from occasional notices in the critical Press. Criticism has, I am told, been unkind and unjust to Miss Corelli, and her contempt for its professors has been tolerably well advertised. Quite unbiassed by the common sentiments of the lady and her critics one for another, I have read 'The Master-Christian' with the object of giving an honest opinion of its merits for whatever that opinion may be worth. And in view of the enormous and ever-growing popularity Miss Corelli's work enjoys with a vast section of that curiously heterogeneous mass, the English reading public, I can only hope that 'The Master-Christian' does not represent its author at her best. For, judged on its own intrinsic merits—the one and only fashion

in which any work of art should be judged—it seems to me to be a quite surprisingly bad book. Its one good quality is a sort of wild and undisciplined strength—a strength which, had Miss Corelli been endowed with a very moderate modicum of the faculties of self-criticism and self-correction, might have clarified into genuine literary power. Miss Corelli reminds her reader of those unfortunate athletes who have fallen victims to the vice of over-training and have become 'muscle-bound,' with the result that it costs them as severe an effort to lift a glass to their lips as to raise a three-hundred-pound dumb-bell. To vary the simile, she is as the pythoness of old, who could not speak except in a scream, and with a vast expenditure of froth. 'The Master-Christian' is one prolonged and strident shriek from its first page to its last. Its most ordinary incident is recounted with the same wild and whirling rush of verbiage as its most melodramatic. Everybody in the book is an abnormality on his or her particular lines—abnormally good, or wicked, or gifted; and they all express their different idiosyncrasies at abnormal length and with abnormal self-conscious satisfaction. Miss Corelli's emotional palette is set only with the purest and most glaring primary tints; she seems to have neither use for, nor knowledge of, the quiet greys and browns which round and reconcile the more brilliant colours of the social panorama. Among the figures of this book we have Cardinal Felix Bonpré, a monster of goodness; Varillo, the artist, a monster of vanity

and jealousy; Angela Sovrani, a monster of genius; Gherardi and Moretti, monsters of priestly craft; the Marquis Fontenelle and Miraudin, the actor, monsters of sensuality; and the 'marvellous boy' Manuel, a monster of a (literally) supernatural sort, of whom more anon. Each of these people poses in his own little circle of limelight, and never for a moment quits the conventional scowl or leer by which his distinguishing peculiarity is impressed upon the reader. Miss Corelli would seem to have taken Ouida for her model. There is the same sense of theatrical unreality in the work of both. The same incommunicable odour of sawdust and orange-peel which surrounds our memories of Astley's Theatre hangs about the pages of their books; the same solemnity in the perpetration of literary absurdities, the same monumental unhumorousness are common to both. This general resemblance is perhaps heightened in the pages of 'The Master-Christian' by the circumstance that its scene is laid for the most part in Italy, a country which Ouida has pre-empted almost as strictly as Mr. Kipling has appropriated India. Miss Corelli's manner of reminding her reader of the foreign atmosphere he is supposed to breathe consists of the simple means of interlarding the conversation she puts into the mouths of her characters with such recondite fragments of the Tuscan tongue as 'Veramente!' 'Che, che,' 'mia dolcezza,' 'ebben,' and the like. She has also, by the way, one or two French locutions of a peculiar kind—'Chocolat fondant, garantie très pure,' and 'Tu vas te

crever sur terre avant je te quitte,' but the quaintest of her merely verbal blunders is attributed to the philanthropist and orator, Aubrey Leigh, who tells an audience of some thousands of people that he has 'seen the consummation of many godless marriages.' Ouida in her own gifted person has never done anything better than that.

One of the chief faults of 'The Master-Christian' is the straggling and indeterminate character of its construction. Only two of the scores of people with whose sayings and doings the book concerns itself are at all continuously in evidence before the reader; the Cardinal, Felix Bonpré, and the boy he adopts as his travelling companion, Manuel, an otherwise nameless waif whom he finds at midnight on the steps of the Cathedral at Rouen; and they are by no means the most interesting personalities in the book. The Cardinal, though introduced and accompanied by a great flourish of trumpets as a living antithesis and reproof to the faults and failings of the Church of Rome and of its priesthood, does nothing to justify his creator's constant panegyrics. He moves through much of the action of the succession of disjointed episodes with which the book is filled, and talks as indefatigably as the rest of the people concerned, but his effect on the course of the story is practically nil. So, also, with his protégé, the boy Manuel, whom Miss Corelli has invested with a spurious interest by presenting him as a re-incarnation of Christ. A critic who frankly takes his stand in the ranks of Agnosticism,

and whose attitude towards Divine mysteries is far nearer that of blank negation than of hope in their reality, may perhaps be conscious of some incongruity in venturing to reprove for profanity a writer like Miss Corelli, who loudly, and I believe, with perfect sincerity, proclaims herself not merely ethically, but dogmatically, a Christian. But I cannot think that Miss Corelli is doing good service for the faith she professes herself so anxious to serve and to purify by what is, and must inevitably be, a vulgarisation of the Divine figure of Jesus. That Miss Corelli is not the first novelist who has been guilty of such a blunder I am quite aware, but the absolute failure which has attended all attempts to reconstruct the character of Christ for purposes of fiction might surely have acted as a deterrent.

The author of 'The Master-Christian' gives sufficient proof in that volume of a long and intimate acquaintance with the New Testament, with copious citations from which her book is thickly strewn; so she can scarcely plead ignorance of the plain and categorically expressed warning that the second coming of Christ will not be in any form of disguise, human or otherwise, but in His full powers and terrors as the Lord of heaven and earth. By what warrant—as a Christian—does Miss Corelli, merely for her own purpose as a story-teller, bring Him down in the form of a lost and homeless tramp? There is, surely, little reverence in such a liberty. And it is, to me, amazing that so clever a person as Miss Corelli should not be able to see how grave a mistake, merely from the artistic

point of view, she has made in this proceeding. Short of assuming some such direct Divine inspiration as that claimed by the Evangelists to whom we owe the biography of Christ, how can she justify her assumption of such a task as the presentation of such a personality in action among the men and things of this world? How is a writer—any merely human writer—to rise to the height of such an argument? What a serene, what an ineffable confidence in his proper genius such a writer must possess! Did Miss Corelli ever study the mere literary style of the utterances of Christ — of the Lord's Prayer, of the Beatitudes, of the story of the Prodigal, of the words regarding the little children or the lilies of the field?—utterances which, setting apart the alleged divinity of their speaker, and forgetting for the moment the divinity of their significance, are, merely as human speech, flawlessly beautiful in melody and unapproachable in the terseness and pregnancy of their expression, exquisite as flowers and tense as steel. Voltaire, Pascal, De Foe, or Ruskin would have shrunk from the task of forging a pastiche of such a style, Miss Corelli undertakes it with perfect readiness and perfect self-approval. 'Manuel' accompanies Cardinal Bonpré to the Vatican, and the following excerpts from his address to the Pope will serve, perhaps, to show the reader the extent of Miss Corelli's justification in presenting him as a reincarnation of the Divine Socialist of Galilee :—

'What, do you not also believe?' asked Manuel, placing one foot on the first step of the Pope's throne, and looking

him straightly in the face, 'Do you not even affirm that God answers prayer? Do you not pray? Do you not assert that you yourself are benefited and helped—nay, even kept alive by the prayers of the faithful? Then why should you doubt that Cardinal Bonpré has, by his prayer, rescued one life—the life of a little child? Is not your Church built up for prayer? Do you not command it? Do you not even insist upon the "vain repetitions" which Christ forbade? Do you not summon the people to pray in public?—though Christ bade all who truly sought to follow Him to pray in secret? And amid all the false prayers, the unthinking, selfish petitions, the blasphemous demands for curses and confusion to fall upon enemies and contradictors, the cowardly cryings for pardon from sinners who do not repent that are sent up to the throne of the Most High—is it marvellous that one prayer, pure of all self and sophistry, ascending to God, simply to ask for the life of a child, should be heard and granted?' . . . .

Like a shrunken white mummy set in a gilded sarcophagus, the representative of St. Peter huddled himself together, reflections of the daylight on the crimson hangings around him casting occasional gleams of crimson athwart his bony hands and cadaverous features. . . .

'Faith must surely be weaker in these days than in the days of Christ!' continued Manuel. 'The disciples were not always wise or brave; but they believed in the power of their Master! You—with so many centuries of prayer behind you—will not say as John did—"Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us!" Because this miracle is unexpected and exceptional, do you say of your good Cardinal, "He followeth not us?" Remember how Christ answered—"Forbid him not, for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name that can speak evil of Me!"'

Still the same silence reigned. A shaft of sunlight falling through the high oriel window, touched the boy's hair with a Pentecostal flame of glory.

'You sent for me,' he went on, 'and I have come! They say I must be taught. Will you teach me? I would know many things! Tell me for one, why are you here, shut away from the cities, and the people? Should you not be among them? Why do you stay here all alone? You must be very unhappy!' . . . .

'To be here all alone!' went on Manuel, 'and a whole world outside waiting to comforted! To have vast wealth lying about you unused—with millions and millions of poor, starving, struggling, dying creatures, near at hand, cursing the God whom they have never been taught to know or to bless! To be safely sheltered while others are in danger! To know that even kings and emperors are trembling on their thrones because of the evil days that are drawing near in punishment for evil deeds!—to feel the great pulsating ache of the world's heart beating through every hour of time, and never to stretch forth a hand of consolation! Surely this must make you very sad? Will you not come out with me?'

With a strong effort the Pope raised himself and looked into the pleading Angel-face. . . .

'Come out with you!' he said, in a hoarse, faint whisper, come out with you!'

'Yes!—Come out with me!' repeated Manuel, his accents vibrating with a strange compelling sweetness, 'come out and see the poor lying at the great gates of St. Peter's—the lame, the halt, the blind—come and heal them by a touch, a prayer! You can, you must, you shall heal them!—if you will! Pour money into the thin hands of the starving!—come with me into the miserable places of the world—come and give comfort! Come freely into the courts of kings, and see how the brows ache under the crowns!—how the hearts break beneath the folds of velvet and ermine! Why stand in the way of happiness,

or deny even emperors peace when they crave it? Your mission is to comfort, not to condemn! You need no throne! You want no kingdom!—no settled place—no temporal power! Enough for you to work and live as the poorest of all Christ's ministers—without pomp, without ostentation or public ceremonial, but simply clothed in pure holiness! So shall God love you more! So shall you pass unscathed through the thick of battle, and command Brotherhood in the place of Murder! Go out and welcome Progress!—take Science by the hand!—encourage Intellect!—for all these things are of God, and are God's gifts divine! Live as Christ lived, teaching the people personally and openly;—loving them, pitying them, sharing their joys and sorrows, blessing their little children! Deny yourself to no man;—and make of this cold temple in which you now dwell self-imprisoned a home and refuge for the friendless and the poor! Come out with me!'

Miss Corelli treats us to eight pages of this eloquence—'Manuel,' in this one interview, speaking, I should fancy, several times as many words as are recorded as having been spoken by his Divine prototype in the entire course of His sojourn upon earth. And he is obviously quite capable of going on, and, like the occupant of the ancient tripod alluded to by Mr. Montagu Tigg, 'prophesying to a perfectly unlimited extent,' but that the Pope faints—as well he might, poor old gentleman!—and the Cardinal and his protégé 'go out' of the Vatican unaccompanied by his Holiness. This scene inevitably brings to mind another book, whose purport and intent are one with those of 'The Master-Christian'—Zola's 'Rome,' and, once again, the comparison is hardly to Miss Corelli's advantage. Her denunciation passes away in noise and froth; the cold,

calm, intimate analysis of Zola is biting to-day like a mordant acid into the very fabric of the Vatican. Miss Corelli's sketch of Leo XIII. seems only a pale and inefficient replica of the august and pathetic figure we owe to the genius of the great Frenchman.

'The Master-Christian' has two main themes, the defections and imperfections of the Catholic clergy, and —a matter regarding which Miss Corelli never seems tired of holding forth—the hatred and dread which are —according to Miss Corelli—inevitably kindled in the masculine bosom by any proof of feminine artistic genius. Such knowledge as I possess of the intellectual history of the world leaves me quite in the dark as to the evidence on which Miss Corelli accuses the male half of humanity of a brutal and cowardly hatred of every woman who rises an inch above her sisters in intellectual attainment. I do not remember that George Sand or Rosa Bonheur or Elizabeth Barrett Browning suffered any very virulent persecution on account of their sex; nor, at the present day, do I believe in the existence of one single critic who 'slates' work simply because it is the product of a female hand. Miss Braddon, Mrs. Lynn Lynton, Mrs. Steel, Lady Butler, Miss Clara Montalba—have any of these gifted ladies any such tale of woe to pour into the public ear, and, if so, why are they silent? Is Miss Terry hissed at the Lyceum because she wears an unbifurcated garment? Does the gallery 'guy' Miss Julia Neilson at the Globe? Is the femininity of Miss Marie Lloyd a hissing and a reproach to the habitués of the Pavilion

and the Tivoli? Miss Corelli, apparently, would have us believe something of the sort. In a score of passages in 'The Master-Christian' she accuses men—not merely individuals, but men as a body—of hating, decrying, and hounding down all women who prove their right to intellectual consideration. The principal scene of the book describes how Angela Sovrani, who has painted a great allegorical picture, equalling, if not surpassing, any creation we owe to the genius of Titian or Raffaelle, is stabbed in the back with a dagger by a rival artist, who is her affianced lover, simply because he could not bear to see the powers of himself and his brother-craftsmen put to shame by the genius of a woman! Having stabbed, and, as he thinks, killed Angela, Varillo conceives the idea of claiming the picture as his own Here is the scene in Miss Corelli's own words:—

'Florian!' she said, 'Do you—you of all people in the world—you to whom I have given all my love and confidence—mean to suggest that my work is not my own?'

He looked at her, smiling easily.

'Sweet Angela, not I! I know your genius—I worship it! See!' and with a light grace he dropped on one knee, and snatching her hand, kissed it—then springing up again, he said, 'You are a great creature, my Angela!—the greatest artist in the world,—if we can only make the world believe it!'

Something in his voice, his manner, moved her to a vague touch of dread. Earnestly she looked at him,—wonderingly, and with a passionate reproach in her pure, true eyes. And still he smiled, while the fiends of envy and malice made havoc in his soul.

'My glorious Angela!' he said, 'my bride! my beautiful one! A veritable queen, to whom nations shall pay

homage!' He threw one arm round her waist and drew her somewhat roughly to him. 'You must not be vexed with me, sweetheart!—the world is a cruel world, and always doubts great ability in woman. I only prepare you for what most people will say. But I do not doubt!—I know your power, and triumph in it!' He paused a moment, breathing quickly, —his eyes were fixed on the picture,—then he said, 'If I may venture to criticise—there is a shadow there—there, at the left-hand side of the canvas—do you not see?'

She disengaged herself from his clasp.

'Where?' she asked, in a voice from which all spirit and hopefulness had fled.

'You are sad? My Angela, have I discouraged you? Forgive me! I do not find fault,—this is a mere nothing,— you may not agree with me,—but does not that dark cloud make somewhat too deep a line near the faded roses? It may be only an effect of this waning light,—but I do think that line is heavy and might be improved. Be patient with me!— I only criticise to make perfection still more perfect! . . . .'

'Just the slightest softening of the tone—the finishing touch!' he murmured in caressing accents; while to himself he muttered—'It shall not be! It shall never be!' Then with a swift movement his hand snatched at the thing he always carried concealed near his breast—a flash of pointed steel glittered in the light,—and with one stealthy spring and pitiless blow, he stabbed her full and furiously in the back as she stood looking at the fault he had pretended to discover in her picture. One choking cry escaped her lips,—

'Florian—you! You—Florian!' Then reeling, she threw up her arms and fell, face forward on the floor, insensible.

He stood above her, dagger in hand,—and studied the weapon with a strange curiosity. It was crimson and wet with blood. Then he stared at the picture. A faint horror began to creep over him. The great Christ in the centre of the painting seemed to live and move, and float towards him on clouds of blinding glory.

Were Varillo presented as a type of insanity, this incident might pass. But he is not so presented; he is offered to the reader as a type—and a common type—of male humanity. Comment is needless—he would be a curiously stupid reader who needed to have the glaring absurdity of such a situation dwelt upon, and the writer capable of presenting it is surely quite beyond the power of argument or remonstrance. The amiable Varillo, it may be stated, comes to an end almost worthy of him. He finds refuge in a Trappist monastery on the Campagna. The circumstance that the monastery was an abode of the Trappist Order gave me a momentary pleasure, because one of the strictest rules of that Order is the rule of silence, which seemed to promise at least a brief surcease of the flood of gabble in which all Miss Corelli's characters indulge. But she very cleverly gets over the difficulty by the introduction of Brother Ambrosio, who is mad, and, therefore allowed to talk — a liberty of which he takes abundant advantage. He overhears a plot laid by Varillo and a Roman prelate, the object of which is further mischief to Angela Sovrani, and, while the other monks are digging their graves in the garden, he fires the monastery and incinerates the wicked painter and himself, and the curtain falls upon them, Varillo shrieking for mercy and Brother Ambrosio, like a sort of ecclesiastical Nero, playing the organ among the flames.

I am as far from holding a brief for the personnel of the Catholic clergy as I am from being the advocate of any form of supernatural faith, but I would ask such readers of 'The Master-Christian' as may peruse this article to take with a very large grain of salt one very serious charge brought by Miss Corelli against a body of men who, according to their lights, are for the most part men of honest, blameless, and laborious lives—the accusation of general unchastity. It is true that that accusation is never definitely formulated. It would have spoken more loudly for Miss Corelli's honesty of purpose if she had had the sad courage of her conviction, and had stated in plain terms a belief which this book certainly inculcates, that the priestly profession of celibacy is a mere cloak for licentious living. With the exception of Cardinal Bonpré—who is pretty obviously suspected by his fellow ecclesiastics of being the father of the waif Manuel—there is hardly a priestly figure in the book who is not a more or less shameless profligate. There is the Abbé Vergniaud, a professed atheist, who wears clerical dress and performs clerical functions, and who preaches a sermon in the church of Notre Dame de Lorette in the course of which he confesses to being the father of an illegitimate son, which said son brings the sermon to an untimely close by firing a pistol at him. There is Cazeau, a priestly official of the Cathedral of Rouen, who has seduced and deserted a peasant girl, so driving her to insanity, and causing her to end her life as

his murderess and her own. There is Gherardi, a prelate high in the entourage of the Pope himself, who keeps a mistress in a villa at Frascati. One is reminded of the mildly sarcastic remark of the good Thomas of Sarranza regarding the merry stories of the 'Decameron.' 'Excellent Italian, but a thought monotonous. Monks and nuns were never *all* unchaste.' Satire, to be effective, must needs keep some measure of verisimilitude. Miss Corelli may have private and particular reasons for hating the Church of Rome and its servants, or she may be merely moved by an exaggeration of that distrust and fear of the Catholic priesthood which actuate many other worthy people; but, be that as it may, she should remember that too crude or violent a denunciation of any thing or any person is certain to create a revulsion of feeling in favour of the thing or person denounced. France and Italy are not so far away from England but that thousands of English men and women know the minutiæ of their social life quite as well as Miss Corelli can claim to do, and only the most credulous of her readers will believe that the priests of either country are as she has chosen to paint them.

De Profundis.*

MY DEAR ARTHUR,—I have received a letter from your father in which he tells me, with the air of one imparting a discovery, that you have strong literary leanings. I could have told him as much within an hour of meeting you at the station when I ran down to Beechcroft for a week's holiday in the spring, though it was full seven years since I had last seen you, a gauky lad, all knees and elbows, clad in cricket-flannels, and beautifully innocent of any leanings whatsoever except to the noisier and muddier forms of field sports practised by your contemporaries. I knew by the flush in your cheeks and the glitter in your eyes as you shook hands with me on the platform that I was to you no mere prosaic, commonplace uncle, but that wonderful and worshipful personage—a writer of books.

Your father encloses a bulky little bundle of manuscript—principally verse—in your handwriting, and asks for candid criticism thereon, telling me that you

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* Being the views of a Literary man on the Literary Life, addressed, in the form of an epistle, to a young man of promise who contemplates joining the profession of Letters.

have consented to receive my judgment of your literary powers, and to abide by it. Well, I will be candid with you, and speak my mind. The dream you cherish, in common with Heaven knows how many other youngsters of your years now scribbling over the face of England, is true. You are a poet. Through all sorts of little failures of technique; in spite of occasional lapses into the bathetic; despite the imitative tendency invariably to be found in youthful work, the divine spirit of Poesy shines out, radiant and unmistakable. Have no fear that I am consciously flattering you, or that I allow my critical sense to be warped by relationship. I write those words with the fullest sense of their import, and I never wrote any words less willingly since my fingers first held a pen. I should have found far more comfort in my critical task if your work were merely mediocre, flat prose cut into jingling lengths, such as thousands of decent tax-paying citizens have written before the necessities of life drove them to the desk or the counter. But you, God help you! are a *poet*, and, like all such unhappy beings, will walk your way and dree your weird though all the uncles in Christendom should say you nay. It is only a fool who wastes strength and temper in fighting the inevitable, or I should have done my best a year ago to turn you from the quicksand to which you are drifting. It is some advantage merely to foresee a catastrophe; though it be impossible to avert it, one may take measures to soften its effects, and for the last six months the question of how to

mitigate the misfortune of your genius has been the chief problem of my leisure hours.

'The misfortune of genius?' I think I hear you repeat. I write the words in all sad sincerity, honestly believing that in this year of grace, 1900, high literary capacity is as dire a curse as can well fall upon an unmoneyed Englishman. Not in any sense *you* can attach to the word; not in any sense which you, in your happy ignorance of the world of letters and of that infinitely greater world of which it is so very insignificant a part, can conceive. The phrase has set your fancy wandering about the steep and thorny paths of the great world-Calvary, strewn, from the quagmire at its base to the Cross at its summit, with the bones of the martyrs of genius—Chatterton, Coleridge, and Rousseau, Shelley and Socrates, and their myriad nameless fellow-sufferers. And, with the thought, you have no doubt worked yourself into a condition of beautiful enthusiasm, and are quite ready to take your place in that glorious company at any price of martyrdom. You are still in the honey of sweetness and the bond of innocence, still believing that a God-gifted singer has only to walk into the forum and open his lips for all men to listen and applaud, or to shut their ears and curse; and ready, with the splendid enthusiasm of youth, to accept either fate with becoming modesty and courage. You know nothing of the social movements of the hour, even less than nothing of the broad current of tendency on whose surface they are as straws showing

the direction of the tide. For you, Letters is still the noblest of crafts, the Pen, the sceptre of genius. It would be easier for me to foster these illusions, or at least to leave them unmolested. I shall get but little thanks for turning my Diogenes' lantern upon them, for showing as it is the wilderness of wilted petals and withered stalks you have taken for a garden of Eden. I shall get even less thanks, perhaps, for telling you that martyrdom is as little to be feared as apotheosis is to be hoped for.

Society has taken to reading. It has made Letters fashionable. It has invented a literature for itself, and fabricates its own writers by the score. It has invented journalism, which feeds it with the tittle-tattle it loves; the modern drama and the modern novel, wherein it sees, as in a beautifying mirror, its own follies and stupidities and ignorances decked out in such gewgaw graces of style as its present development of taste enables it to relish. The *vers de société*, with its opera-bouffe jingle and faded odour of hot-house flowers, is its favoured substitute for the organ music which filled the spacious times of great Elizabeth. In a word, literature—imaginative literature—is dead in England. All kinds of graveyard and charnel-house counterfeits are dismally skipping and leering in its likeness, but *it*—the Protean spirit of mirth and tears, of pathos, fun, and tragedy—is as dead as Pharaoh. Optimistic lovers of literature tell us it is but sleeping, presently to rise gloriously renewed. I envy them so happy a conviction, though how any thoughtful man

can believe in that resurrection within the period of our present civilisation is beyond my understanding.

A close inquiry into the ultimate causes of the decay of literature would take us into deep water, and I propose to touch only lightly on that portion of my theme, which I would fain see exhaustively treated by a writer possessed of the necessary knowledge. The decline of religion, sapping the postulates upon which imaginative literature is necessarily built, is an important factor. The old beliefs which gave warmth and colour to life are dispelled. Man is no longer the most enthralling of all problems, the most marvellous of all spectacles, a living soul crossing the razor-bridge of existence, with hell yawning beneath him and heaven as his goal; but a combination of salts and gases which will sooner or later find their way back to the kindred elements of which all nature is composed, held together by a modicum of vital force, whose individuality will be absorbed into the void of being at their dissolution. We have grown commonplace to each other, and, as a necessary consequence or corollary, to ourselves; and great imaginative literature is not written of or by commonplace people. We have no longer the political ideals of our ancestors to lend purpose to our efforts and dignity to our lives. The liberties they fought for, strove for through life and proclaimed in death, are our unquestioned patrimony, and have grown commonplace, too. A less important factor, yet worthy of mention, is the shrinkage of the globe caused by the application of steam and electricity. The once illimit-

able earth has dwindled to the dimensions of an orange slung in a network of rails and wires. We have shorn man of eternity, and we are taking from him time and space. The antres vast and deserts idle of old romance have been crossed in an autumn trip by the shirt-fronted and swallow-tailed gentleman who sits beside me at dinner. He saw no anthropophagi, no men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders; not even Chingachgook or Uncas, only a few dirty and dispirited savages in broken feathers and tattered blankets. Men in tweeds and stove-pipe hats bargain for swine's flesh, corn, and potatoes on the site of the City of Amaurote, and two-cent steamers ply on the waters of Anyder. You will not find Utopia or Brobdingnag on any chart, and might as well look for a naiad in the pools of Thessaly as for a fairy in the woods of Warwickshire. God, the gods, the pixies, and the devil are gone, and a man shall travel the wide world over and see nothing better or worse than himself on this man-haunted planet. And man, *quâ* man, man 'simple of himself,' is almost valueless as a subject for literature, as he is beginning to find. Shorn of the adjuncts of the supernatural; seen simply as the foolish and cruel animal as which history and observation reveal him; ignorant even of his own mechanism and of the laws which govern it; more darkly ignorant still of the vaster mysteries of which he thinks himself the hub and centre; he may still make 'copy' for the cynic and the satirist—to the poet he is hardly richer in suggestion than a kennel of hounds, or the parrot-house at the Zoo.

We hear much nowadays of the prosperity of literature. We who practise it are in the habit of looking back with self-congratulatory scorn on those times, not so far distant, when the rank and file of the literary army were social pariahs; when even its honoured veterans were held barely fit company for merchants and professional men; and when it needed the genius of Pope or the savage self-assertion of Swift for a writer to be admitted on anything like equal terms into the upper ranks of Society. We look back with pity, a pity not untouched with scorn, on the shadowy figure of Samuel Johnson, supperless and roofless in the midnight streets, on Goldsmith fuddling himself in a Fleet Street tavern on a borrowed guinea, and with contempt on the society which despised and neglected them.

I don't say that either our pity or our contempt is misplaced. Genius starving and in rags, genius drowning its sordid troubles in eleemosynary drink, is a pitiful spectacle, and contempt for the age which despised it is a fitting sentiment. But I do say that we might profitably look nearer home, at our own times, and learn that, changed as is the condition of our literary men, it is not in all respects—not even in the most important—changed for the better. The old life of hunger and hardship, rough and sordid as it was, had its good sides. For one thing, it was so hard and coarse, so ill-paid and generally contemned, that it tempted nobody who did not believe himself to be a genius to take it up. Of course, plenty of poor fellows

quite devoid of talent *did* take it up, but they thought they had talent. And though, when failure had cured them of their illusions, they sometimes came to have as low an estimate of their craft as any society journalist —they could scarcely have a lower than some who thrive to-day—they started with a much higher ideal than is common in these times. They proved that, first, by joining so wretched and despised a profession at all; and, again, by their hearty and outspoken contempt for the class of which we—their unworthy successors—are content to be the very humble and obedient servants—the *bourgeoisie*. The *bourgeois*, of course, scorned them, but his contempt, compared with that of the artist for him, was as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine. The middle-class despised the literary man because they despised literature, and, despising it, they left it alone. They looked after their ledgers and their day-books, their tallow, and tea, and hides, and let the shabby poor devil of an author go his way, and scribble his nonsense for those who cared to read it; which was precisely the best thing they could have done, and what I wish to heaven they could be persuaded to do again.

Everybody knows those pathetic lines in 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' which their author, grand old Samuel Johnson, could never repeat without a tremor in his voice—lines in which he bids the young aspirant to literature to 'mark what ills the scholar's life assail; Toil, envy, want, *the patron*, and the gaol.' Of all these ills we have taught ourselves to think the

patron the worst. We don't mind toil, since it is the universal lot, and by it we may escape from want; envy, though it will intrude itself into all but the noblest heart, rarely hurts any one but him who harbours it; the gaol is no longer an inevitable incident in the scholar's career, and of that other bugbear, the patron, we are gloriously free. When Mr. Jones writes a poem, or Mr. Brown writes a novel, he does not look through the peerage for the name and titles of some noble friend of letters who will give him ten pounds for a fulsome dedication. His patron is the public, which, if it likes the book, will give its author a good deal more than ten pounds, will admit him to the society of its wives and daughters, and even let him marry one of the latter, if he will. The advantages of the new system over the old are obvious. The disadvantages are less obvious, but they exist, for all that.

In plain English, all this talk about the widespread love of literature which distinguishes this age from all preceding epochs, is the veriest and saddest bunkum ever talked. The mob—by which I mean the intellectual *hoi polloi*, without distinction of social classes, including 97 or so per cent. of English men and women — has no conception of what literature is, and, consequently, no love of it. The public likes books, which is quite another thing. The books it prefers, like most other things that find favour in its eyes, are generally idle, silly, and useless. The sale of a book of imaginative literature is almost always in exact ratio

with its worthlessness to the heart and brain of any living creature. Literature is undergoing that process of vulgarisation which is the inevitable fate of all great things unfortunate enough to attract the attention of the crowd—see the history of Christianity *passim*. While that religion was the faith only of a few scattered handfuls of enthusiasts, it retained something of the divine spirit of its founder. It became the shibboleth of Europe, and its degradation advanced *pari passu* with its popularity, till to-day, were it not for an occasional phenomenon like Father Damien, the very meaning of the word would be forgotten. The mass of its professors are as stupid and as cruel as their pagan ancestors who crucified the Man we mock by calling 'Master,' never open the Book which contains His laws, and spend their lives in breaking them. And, as a consequence—for in the pasture of humanity it is the sheep who give the law to the shepherd—its so-called teachers are devoid of every characteristic of Christianity. Its accredited representatives are gentlemanly and cultured agnostics, wise in the learning of the Egyptians, and using the political power Christ specifically forbade them to accept to veto every proposed law illuminated by a spark of His spirit. Its unaccredited teachers are noisy vulgarians, of whom 'General' Booth is the type *in excelsis*. I am speaking roughly and broadly, of course. I don't say there are no Christians in the world. I have met one or two, and there are no doubt many more, priests and laymen of all sorts of Churches. But they are a scattered

remnant; the very smallest of drops in the very biggest of buckets.

A strikingly similar effect has been produced upon literature by the spread of Uninstruction, facetiously known to its propagators and recipients as the March of Education. What I am here saying will, I know, disgust you profoundly. I wouldn't give a button for you if I thought it would not, because it is of the very essence of what is justly called pessimism, and a pessimist of your years is as sad a spectacle as it has been given to my eyes to see. Most people believe in the capacity of the average man to receive and assimilate elevated ideas; to become not merely 'educated,' but in the best sense of the word, 'instructed'; to select for the building of his mental tissue and fibre the best materials and reject the poorest; just as, if he had the choice, he would learn to prefer good beef and honest beer to the offal and swipes on which he is too often condemned to batten. As a matter of fact, the exact opposite is the case. It is not that the average reader is incapable of differentiating between good books and bad. He differentiates with unfailing accuracy, and always chooses the bad. He does more, he *creates* bad literature. In his own image creates he it. Bad literature only exists where, and in proportion as, the mass of the population is 'educated.' As readers are few, books are few and good. As readers grow numerous books increase in number and decline in excellence. To popularise literature is inevitably to kill it.

What may be thought by many a very ready and complete answer may be offered here. I think I hear it asked, 'Are not Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray read by everybody, and are not their writings great literature?' Yes, but they are popular, not because of, but in spite of, the qualities which make them valuable to the cultured minority. They are read because they make their reader laugh, or cry, or shudder, because they distract his mind from its everyday occupations by thrilling stories of adventure, or please him by reproducing familiar scenes in an atmosphere of romance or caricature. Ask the average reader which he prefers, the rollicking farce of 'Pickwick' or the social science and satire of 'Hard Times'; which interests him most, that sickly and impossible little Nell, or the deeply and calmly passionate Lizzie Hexam? Contrast that insufferable bit of maudlin sentimentality, the death of Paul Dombey, with Paul's talk with the clockmaker, or with the vision of Sidney Carton on the platform of the guillotine, or with the sentencing of Abel Magwitch. I have heard the first lauded to the skies a thousand times; I have hardly ever heard the others even mentioned. I insist specially on Dickens for several reasons. He is indubitably the most popular of all great English writers, and, to my thinking at least, as indubitably the most inartistic and imperfect of them all. And it is always his trickiest and least worthy work which is most admired.

We see this utter lack of artistic comprehension in the fashion in which the public rushes from the altars of

the very few really great men it cares to worship to that of any bedizened fetish which takes its silly fancy. To tell me that the public which adores Miss Marie Corelli, and buys a hundred thousand copies of 'Three Men in a Boat' has any comprehension of literature *as* literature is to insult my common-sense. It likes Miss Corelli and Walter Scott, Dickens and Mr. Jerome, for the same reasons. Scott and Miss Corelli both tell stories. The one tells them like a great artist, the other does not. Dickens and Mr. Jerome both aim at inspiring laughter. That they succeed equally is as good a commentary on the common intelligence as to take alternate swigs of comet hock and unsweetened gin would be upon the physical palate of an individual. True, Scott and Dickens will remain, while our latter-day idols will sooner or later slip back into their native obscurity. The majority would let them and their bungling imitators slide together, and would regret one set of writers as little as the other.

And, as time goes on, the intelligent minority is becoming more and more limited to that one task of preserving the valuable portions of the literature of past times, and less and less operative as an inducement to the creation of new work of value. It is not that that minority is decreasing in numbers. There are at least as many men and women of fine taste and just judgment to-day in ratio with the population as there have ever been, but beside the vast mass of the ignorant and vulgar they are hardly worth while catering for. Literature is a trade like another; and even

men of high power, who begin the literary life with high ideals, grow weary of 'sitting empty stomach'd on Parnassus,' and descend into the dirty arena to contest with the crowd of sublimated penny-a-liners who provide our current fiction. Read the next half-dozen novels published by the best among them, and see what sediment of idea or emotion they leave in your mind. Their authors are men of real talent, capable of producing matter of solid worth, but seduced from allegiance to their genius and their higher instincts by the facility with which they can make large sums of money by catering for the stupidity they despise. They can manufacture a mediocre novel with one third the time and trouble it would take to write a good one, and they can get six times as much for it. One of the most popular and able of the crowd told me the other day that he had contracted to deliver nine average-sized volumes of fiction in the next three years, or three novels of the ordinary circulating library length per annum. And this, in addition to fugitive journalistic and critical work; so that for eight or ten hours a day the pen would not leave his fingers, and an hour after writing *finis* to one story he must take it up again to write 'Chapter I.' of the next. What is likely to be, what can be, the value of work so done? As Carlyle asked Lytton, who was boasting the regularity with which every hour of his working day was filled by its especial task—'And when d'ye *think*, man?' Nor is this case at all exceptional. I could name half a dozen others who produce at approximate

rates, and there are literally scores who write their two and three novels a year. There are, of course, thank God—one hopes there will always continue to be—one or two loftier souls who scorn

> To take a part
> At the Belshazzar's feast of Art,

and, contemptuous of the servile crowd who sell their manhood and blaspheme their genius in the literary brothel, walk proudly aloof, speaking their word of honest counsel to the few who care to listen. As the else obsolete spirit of Christianity finds splendid, if fitful, recrudescence in the lives of Robert Owens and Father Damiens, and of others not less honourable of whom the world never hears; so even this century of intellectual prostitution is sweetened by such men as Browning and Meredith in literature, Wagner and Liszt in music, G. F. Watts in painting, Ruskin and Spencer in criticism and philosophy. That such men are few is not the fault of the age. They were never common in any age. But in former times their voices would at least have been audible, not quenched by the roar of the catchpenny quacks and ignorant dunces who now monopolise the public ear. Fame came to Meredith, and Liszt, and Wagner to find them old, and to Berlioz to find him dead. Ruskin, who preached the purest of gospels with unequalled eloquence for more than half a century, was voted 'mad' by the generation he pitied and reproved. Spencer's 'Data of Ethics' has been before the world

for twenty years, and has sold to the extent of five thousand copies. Watts, not long ago, offered to paint the walls of a public building gratis, and (shade of Raffaelle!) to find his own colours! The offer was refused! Meanwhile, the 'Master-Christian' makes a literary reputation, 'go-as-you-please' shows cover their three hundred nights apiece, and the prurient claptrap phantasies by which M. Jan Van Beers disgraces his genius set agog the capitals of Europe.

That bastard sister of Literature known as Journalism was doomed from the hour of her birth to a more rapid, though scarcely deeper, degradation than that to which Letters has fallen. The direct servant of the great mass, and appealing to the average mind, it started of necessity on a low intellectual plane. Many of its disabilities are inherent in its very nature, others as grave are the inevitable results of the pitiably low ideals of the men who direct and cater for it. Of the first class, the *ad captandum* judgments pronounced from day to day—indeed, from hour to hour—on matters of the most vital importance in every conceivable direction, are the worst features of journalism. A trenchant style, a happy gravity of audacity in dealing with any subject entrusted to his pen, and a practised rapidity of composition, are gifts far more valued in the leader writer of a daily paper than the most exhaustive scholarship or the most truly philosophic habit of thought. The most solid and brilliant talents are useless to the journalist unless combined

with that 'intellectual levity' which Matthew Arnold justly declared to be the curse of modern intellectual life. He has only his hour and a half wherein to manufacture his 'column and a turn,' whether his theme be a measure affecting imperial destinies or a forecast of the events of the racing season. Questions, to which Mr. Lecky or Mr. Frederic Harrison would give hours or days of anxious thought and careful research under the best possible conditions for quiet reflection, are settled by him in the gas-heated and tumultuous atmosphere of a printing office at the rate of twelve hundred words an hour. Remember also that every journal now running is the organ of a political clique, a trading corporation, or an individual faddist; and ask yourself what is likely to be the value of its views on nine-tenths of the matters treated in its columns, and what chance of expressing his own convictions—always supposing him to possess any—a retained and salaried scribe can hope for.

So much—for the moment—for the literary aspect of the journalistic craft, to which I shall have presently to revert. Its principal functions are, of course, the securing and publication of news. This task it discharges with an efficiency beyond praise. There are episodes in the history of journalism of difficulties vanquished, dangers confronted, and pain, discomfort, and even death tranquilly borne by pressmen in the search for 'copy' which rank beside the most famous military heroisms. But such feats find their set-off in

others in which heroism, not to speak of common honesty, is sadly to seek. More than once in my experience, leading metropolitan journals have stooped to actions only to be described as base. By what other epithet can be classed the purchase, from a thievish Government clerk, of the draft of a Treaty which not merely the Government of the day, but the whole country, was interested in keeping a profound secret? More than one such case has occurred of recent years.

Indeed, in the last generation the whole tone of the Press has been appreciably lowered. Formerly there seemed to exist among the editors of the leading London papers a sort of tacit bargain not to outbid each other in popular favour by the publication of too questionable matter. The loathsome *cause célèbre* still remembered in legal circles as the Bolton and Parke trial was a case in point. Only one journal, and that a weekly of low order, published the evidence in full, and there was a noticeable and praiseworthy reticence in the journalistic comments it evoked. After the equally disgusting Cleveland Street affair the very atmosphere of journalism was foul as with the noisome effluvium of an open sewer. When the Criminal and Divorce Courts are sitting, barely a week passes in which humanity and decency are not outraged by stories of murder and eroticism, dragged out by counsel, witnesses, special reporters, and leader writers to a hideous tenuity of sickening detail. There would seem to be no length to which

editors do not think themselves justified in going, no degradation of their craft for which they do not hold themselves excused, by the increase in their circulation of a few thousand copies, and the consequent flow of advertisements to their columns. When neither war, adultery, murder, nor less mentionable matter is at hand, the ingenuity of the newspaper staffs is devoted to the manufacture of some catchpenny horror which may, as nearly as possible, rival their attractions. A dozen cases of cholera or typhoid are magnified into the proportions of historic epidemics—more ink has been shed over the influenza than in centuries had been spent in chronicling the Plague of London.

In the lowest of its most recent manifestations, journalism takes us too far from literature for me to follow it. The cackle of 'society' small talk was bad enough, but at least, while listening to it, we were in the company of well-bred if rather brainless people. It was occasionally amusing, sometimes even instructive, though it could have been the exclusive mental food only of a lower class of intelligence than is conceivable, short of microcephalic idiocy. Its success has prompted the journalistic pioneer to seek an even lower depth, and we have more than one journal which spices the failing attractions of 'my lady's tattle, filtered through her maid,' with the dirty gossip of the West End night houses, and devotes equal space to Belgravia and Pimlico.

So far from having been of any service to literature,

journalism has been by far its most potent enemy. Its influence on Letters is baleful at every point at which they touch. Its hasty and uninstructed judgments on vitally important matters, the vade-mecum-cum-British-Museum-reading-room veneer of learning it parades; the cheaply gaudy style of its correspondence; the flat cockneyism of its police and general reports, are all influences inimical to literature. It lives by, and fosters, all the least worthy impulses of the public mind; and when it is not tragically shallow in dealing with great questions, it is trivially prolix on unimportant ones. It gives importance to all matters in pretty nearly inverse ratio to their real gravity—a hundred columns to a petty social earthquake like the Baccarat Scandal, and a shamefaced paragraph to a great artistic achievement. To these vices, inherent, as I have said, in its very being—since it lives by popular favour—it has of late times added another. It has arrogated to itself the function of literary criticism. What would be the worth of that criticism, were it performed with all possible honesty and all possible desire to forward the interests of literature, is easily ascertainable. Criticism is ungrateful work, and very poorly paid, consequently no man of any real faculty ever willingly stays in it. It may sometimes be the cradle of the literary infant Achilles, it is often the asylum of the broken Belisarius, but it can boast few effective and able-bodied members of the literary army. 'Critic' must always remain what it has always been,

the polite English equivalent for a man of unproved or abortive talent. And criticism is very rarely done with any honesty, or with any desire to forward the interests of literature. On the majority of journals it is scamped as lightly and as easily as possible ; on the big dailies and the professedly literary organs it is performed with open and cynical dishonesty.

Balzac, who hated, as much as he was hated by, the Parisian Press, imagined a condition of affairs which, whether or not yet established in France, is flourishing in rank luxuriance on our own shores. He indicated how a clique of journalists, who, like that other fraternity, his immortal 'Treize,' should devote their lives to the furtherance of their common interests, could, for a time at least, impose upon the public themselves and their friends as the leaders of literature. The seed seemed to have fallen on stony ground, for nearly fifty years passed before the crop reared its head above the soil. It is ripe now, and ready for the sickle, which has already been laid to its root by more than one honest hand. The clique of scribbling *condottieri* who levy blackmail on the public admiration, decrying or ignoring all who will not help roll their literary and artistic logs, have seen their most prosperous days. The trick was too thin, so very thin that it is a wonder it should have served so long. Mr. Jones, after his year or two of patient log-rolling, publishes his feeble little volume of verse or fiction; and the clique he has served, after hailing in the sonorous cant of criticism a new light in the literary

heaven, feeds his flickering flame with paragraphic fuel, and goes on to tell the world that Mr. Jones's favourite breakfast dish is eggs and bacon, or that Mr. Jones prefers a clay pipe to a cigar, and adduces similar facts regarding their *protégé*, until people grow to think that Mr. Jones must be somebody very important indeed so to pervade journalistic space. A dozen such bogus deities could be counted, with whose praises men's ears have rung during the last year or two. The players in this merry little round game do not in the least mind writing themselves down asses in the eyes of all intelligent men, so long as the public reads and believes. Mr. Andrew Lang declared that no man of the last six hundred years but Mr. Haggard could have written 'Eric Brighteyes,' a statement I do most potently believe, though, perhaps, not quite as Mr. Lang would have me. These gentry are never at a loss for a fetish to dance round. King Log succeeds King Stork, and the incense pot goes on stinking before the throne. Indeed, there are half a dozen thrones, and half a dozen King Logs and King Storks sitting thereon, and every journalistic rag has its private deity.

'Granted all this,' I think I hear you ask, 'is it not possible for a man at once honest and able to make a living in the literary circles of London?' Candidly, I doubt if it is. There is honesty and honesty. The word has many meanings, or rather, shades of meaning. I am myself indifferent honest, though I should be sorry not to have honester acquaintances. A man

engaged in literary work in London can be negatively honest at the price of more or less discomfort. He can hold aloof from the men with whom he is forced by the exigencies of his work to mix, and so avoid belonging to a literary clique and shun temptations to critical dishonesty. If he makes friends among the literary class he can only hope to keep them by puffing their work through thick and thin, for to speak or write unfavourably of it is to be denounced and shunned as a traitor. 'Claw me and I'll claw thee,' is the universal rule, and literary men are so dishonest in the matter of criticism as to be incapable of comprehending honesty. And honest in the truest and highest sense, honest to his own convictions, to his public duty, no man who writes for his livelihood can possibly be at any less cost than starvation. He must accept the degraded ideas of literature now in vogue. He must speak no truth, however vital and necessary, which can offend the prurient squeamishness of the reading public; denounce no falsehood, however pusillanimous or deadly, dear to their stupidity.

Candidly, then, I will have no hand in bringing you to London, and will do nothing to help you if you come. If you had less talent than I believe you to possess, my answer might be different. To swell by one the number of unideaed scribblers who are scrambling for ha'pence in the literary gutter would not greatly matter. Imaginative literature is dead and buried, and any number of ghosts may skip upon its grave to the strains of Mr. Redford and Mr. William

Alexander Coote for all I care. But I will not, if I can help it, see such a life as yours might be squandered in that sordid Dance of Death. I cry unto you, *de profundis*, as to one entering the jaws of Hell, 'Go back! Stay in the sunshine. Descend not to these noisome shades.' To me, sick now so long of all the petty jars and miserable spites of this dirty 'literary life,' it seems incredible that any erect and featherless biped with a soul inside him should want to join it. Ignorance only could beget the desire. Take the word of one who *knows*, and who has bought his knowledge dearly and bitterly, only saving some paltry fragments of the soul he started with at the cost of most that makes life endurable, and stay where you are.

You have an honourable and useful career before you in the profession your father wishes you to follow, and one good doctor is worth a planetful of gentlemen of the Press. I am not counselling you to give up literature. Practise it where you are, for which your life will give you ample leisure, and far better opportunities of practising it to worthy effect than you could find in London. The only way to retain the freshness of heart and loyalty of purpose which make a poet is to keep out of this Pandemonium. You will find the best substitutes for the inspirations the world has lost in field and forest, not amid bricks and mortar; in the pages of the poets, not in the cluck and gabble of the Press. You will hear a truer gospel from the lips of the humblest peasant than in the chatter of the

scribbling Sadducees of literary society. You know Blake's lines :—

> He who binds to himself a joy
> Doth the wingèd life destroy ;
> But he who kisses the joy as it flies,
> Lives in eternity's sunrise.

When you have penetrated the spirit of that verse you will have no further desire to change the life of tranquil thought and healthy action among the woods of Beechcroft for the heart-and-brain-sickening existence of a literary drudge.

I am,

Your affectionate uncle,

HENRY

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